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# Is Turkey Turning Away from the West?

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IS TURKEY TURNING AWAY FROM THE WEST?

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of the requirements for  
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## ABSTRACT

HAMIDZADE, SAGHAR Is Turkey turning away from the West?

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The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question of whether Turkey is turning away from its traditional western allies and reorienting itself towards the Middle East. The first chapter examines Turkey's past, particularly the legacy of the Ottoman era, the Kemalist period, and the Cold War era, in order to its historical foundations. The second chapter analyzes the changes on the Turkish domestic scene from 1950 up to today. The focus of this chapter is on the Kemalists' repression of democracy and the social and political shift among much of the population in reaction to their suppressive ways. The third chapter assesses Turkey's political and economic relations with the West, in particular its ties with the United States, the European Union, and Israel in order to understand how and why they have changed in recent years. Finally, the fourth chapter examines Turkey's political and economic relations with the East, specifically Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the broader Arab world. The aim of this chapter is to understand the underlying reasons driving Turkey's growing engagement with the Middle East and whether it contradicts its relations with the West.

After this through examination of Turkey's historical trajectory, its domestic situation, and its current political and economic relations with the East and the West, I have concluded that Turkey is not turning away from the West. Turkey's relations with the Middle East have indeed improved and Turkey--for the first time it in its modern history-- is becoming a major player in the region. Furthermore, its active role in the East is not replacing, but complementing, its relations with the West.

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## **Introduction**

Turkey used to be known for its one-dimensional and strictly westward oriented foreign policy particularly during the Cold War. It mainly focused on its relations with the United States and the European Union, and completely detached itself from the countries that were once part of its Ottoman past. The Middle East especially was never a foreign policy priority for much of the Republic's history. In fact, Turkey associated much of the Muslim world with backwardness and had little interest in establishing ties with Middle Eastern nations. The official ideology of the state, Kemalism, espoused by the founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Ataturk, turned its back on the Islamic world and pursued an exclusively Western path. The Cold War environment, and the Soviet threat further pushed Turkey into the Western camp, as it joined NATO and aligned itself with Washington. For the next several decades, Turkey became known for its unconditional support for U.S. foreign policy and its one-sided orientation.

Today, Turkey's foreign policy stands completely transformed. After decades of benign neglect toward the Middle East, Turkey is now emerging as an active player in the region. Turkey is launching ambitious initiatives in the region and carving out a greater role for itself in Middle Eastern affairs. Over the past few years Turkey has established close ties with Iran, Syria, Iraq, assumed a leadership position in the Organization of Islamic Conference, which is the world's largest Muslim organization, and strengthened

its political, diplomatic and economic ties with most Arab and Muslim states.<sup>1</sup> This departure from its traditional foreign policy has been the source of much debate within the international community, particularly in the United States.

“How the West lost Turkey,” “Turkey turns to the East,” “Turkey’s Shifting Foreign Policy,” are some of the few headlines in the U.S., referring to Turkey’s new foreign policy initiatives. Western claims that Turkey is “drifting away” and being “lost” perhaps began with Turkey’s refusal to allow Washington to use its bases in the War against Iraq. Since 2003, such claims have proliferated, especially with Turkey’s vote against tougher sanctions on Iran, and its deteriorating relations with Israel. In an article published in *The New York Times*, Thomas Friedman, a well-known columnist, stated that “Turkey [is] seemingly focused not on joining the European Union but the Arab League — no, scratch that, on joining the Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel.”<sup>2</sup> Other neo-conservative journalists have made similar allegations. Michael Rubin for example states: “Turks saw themselves in a camp with the United States, Western Europe, and Israel; today Turkish self-identity places the country firmly in a camp led by Iran, Syria, Sudan, and Hamas.”<sup>3</sup> Neo-conservatives are especially skeptical of Turkey’s new engagement in the Middle East. Michael Rubin, for example claims that “Turks saw themselves in a camp with the United States, Western Europe, and Israel;

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<sup>1</sup> Ömer Taspinar, *Turkey’s Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism*, (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2008), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Friedman, "Letter from Istanbul," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/16/opinion/16friedman.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Rubin, “Turkey, from Ally to Enemy,” *Commentary*, July 2010, <http://www.michaelrubin.org/7639/turkey-ally-enemy>.

today Turkish self-identity places the country firmly in a camp led by Iran, Syria, Sudan, and Hamas.”<sup>4</sup> Rubin and other neo-conservatives tend to imply that under the “Islamist” government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey now poses a grave threat to the West.<sup>5</sup> Such analyses about Turkey becoming a dangerous nation and pursuing an Islamist agenda misconstrue Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) main objectives and are a complete misrepresentation of Turkey’s foreign policy.

The AKP government’s new foreign policy has not turned Turkey into a threatening nation; rather it has transformed Turkey into an active regional power and has boosted its strategic importance. Turkey has always played a special role in the international system because of its unique cultural and geographical position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. However, throughout much of its history, it failed to take full advantage of its unique geographical position as it largely ignored its eastern neighbors. Now however, Turkey is utilizing this positive characteristic and expanding its relations in the broader Middle East while maintaining its ties with the EU and the United States. Turkey’s recent economic growth and stability has further increased its strategic importance in the international community. In addition to being a member of NATO and an EU candidate, Turkey is now an active member of the G20, it was given a temporary seat on the UN Security Council in 2009 and as already mentioned it is playing a key role in Organization of the Islamic Conference. Currently a Turk serves as the secretary-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Pipes, "Islamist Turkey Overreaches," *National Review Online*, June 8, 2010, <http://www.danielpipes.org/8467/islamist-turkey-overreaches>.  
<http://www.danielpipes.org/8467/islamist-turkey-overreaches>.

general of the OIC.<sup>6</sup> Turkey's foreign policy is ultimately driven by Ankara's desire to expand its global partnership and enhance its strategic clout. AKP leaders believe the best way to achieve this goal is for Turkey to take advantage of its rich Ottoman legacy and rebuild ties round the former empire.

The question of Turkey's East vs. West orientation is a fascinating one and has important implications for the region. A prosperous, democratic, and stable Turkey, which has good relations with both the East and the West, can take on the role of regional model, mediator and leader. Turkey has the capacity to affect regional and international stability in a number of different areas, including the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Europe. Furthermore, at time of increasing polarization between the West and the Islamic world, Turkey as a modern Muslim nation and a regional superpower, is the only country that has the ability to bridge the gap between East and West.

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<sup>6</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: Anchors aweigh," *The Economist*, October 23, 2010.



## CHAPTER 1: Key Historical Eras

### The Ottoman Era

The Ottoman Empire was one of the most influential and powerful empires in history, known for its incredible expansion and cultural diversity. At the height of its power, the Ottoman Empire stretched over three different continents, including Africa, Europe, and Asia, from the Indian Ocean to the gates of Vienna. It encompassed a wide range of ethnicities and religious groups and was a multicultural empire. The Ottomans were not particularly liberal minded, but were very tolerant of the various religious and ethnic groups that resided within the empire. They welcomed the Jews who were fleeing from the Spanish Inquisition and protected Protestants and Orthodox Christians from Catholic persecution.<sup>7</sup> Although the Ottoman Empire was home to many different religious groups, Sunni Islam was the state religion and the sultans were committed to its protection and expansion.

As the Ottoman Empire conquered Arab lands, Islam gained significant importance. In the early 1500s the Ottoman Empire expanded southward into Arab lands, conquering Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities of Islam, and also Jerusalem. With this expansion it also acquired a great number of new Muslim subjects in the Middle East and North Africa. This conquest “transformed the Ottoman Empire into a world power straddling the ancient routes between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean” and

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<sup>7</sup> Howard A. Douglas, *The History of Turkey* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001), 6.

gradually shifted the Empire's identity towards the Islamic world.<sup>8</sup> By the end of 1533, the Ottomans not only conquered the holy cities of Islam but they had also laid claim to Damascus, the capital of the Umayyad Caliphs, and Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphs. Nearly all of the Arab Middle East was under Ottoman rule and would remain so for nearly 400 years.<sup>9</sup> The conquest of the Arab world solidified the Ottoman Empire's Islamic legitimacy and identity. The sultans now considered themselves both the rulers of the Ottoman Empire as well as the caliphs and guardians of Islam.

Once the Arab states were under Ottoman rule, the empire's Islamic credentials increased significantly, and the Sultans, particularly Sultan Süleyman, now considered it their responsibility to promote Islamic ways. The Ottoman Empire reached the peak of its power due to the reign of Sultan Süleyman (1520-1566), who further expanded the empire and captured the Christian strongholds of Belgrade in 1521 and Vienna in 1529.<sup>10</sup> During his rule, Süleyman established the administrative and legal system of the Empire and fully incorporated Islam in every aspect of the state and society. Süleyman later became known as the "true architect of the Ottoman religious establishment." He established sharia as the overriding law of the Empire and synthesized it along with earlier Ottoman legal law. The fact that Süleyman initiated religious changes during the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks: An Introductory History to 1923* (London: Longman, 1997), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 12.

Ottoman Empire's "golden age" was highly significant in legitimizing the religious institutions.<sup>11</sup>

Under Süleyman's rule, Islamic law became integrated in the political, military, and social institutions of the Ottoman Empire. Knowledge of Islamic theology became a requirement for acquiring legal and administrative positions. Religious scholars were appointed to the head of the Islamic authority by the sultan. These religious scholars further incorporated sharia into the legal system and named the judges who were in charge of enforcing the law. The Islamic school system trained religious scholars, judges, and government bureaucrats, and also educated Muslim Turks, teaching them prayers and verses from the Quran.<sup>12</sup> Because Islam was deeply implemented at both the local and governmental level, it played a unifying role, linking the people to the state.<sup>13</sup> The state-run institutions and Islamic law during this period played a great role in creating an Islamic identity and maintaining stability through its highly centralized character.

The Ottoman Empire's complete focus on traditional and Islamic institutions, however, caused it to remain intellectually behind the rising European powers. The empire's education curriculum was solely based on Quranic teachings and *sharia* law; modern science and technology were rarely incorporated into its educational

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<sup>11</sup> Karen Barkey, "Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, no. 19 (December 2005), 11.

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, *The Ottoman Turks*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Barkey, *Islam and Toleration*, 12.

institutions.<sup>14</sup> With the rise of European powers, the weakness of the traditional Ottoman institutions became highly evident. Compared to the Europeans who were advancing socially, militarily, and economically, the Ottomans were lagging behind. By the seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire was socially and economically stagnant because no sector of the economy was allowed to flourish and disturb the balance and structure of this centralized institution.<sup>15</sup> Once faced with an aggressive and industrial Europe, it became evident that the old Ottoman institutions no longer met the needs of the empire in the modern world, and the Ottomans came to the realization that the West's superiority was due to their developments in science and technology.<sup>16</sup>

Once the Europeans armies began to defeat the Ottomans, statesmen were sent to the West to study the reasons for Europe's military superiority. When they discovered that it was Europe's use of modern science and technology that was contributing to their success, they decided to bring the new technology to the Ottoman Empire by establishing institutions that were similar to that of Europe's. Those familiar with Western institutions created engineering, military, and civil services schools with a secular Western curricula. The Tanzimat, the Ottoman Empire's first serious reform period, began shortly thereafter.

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<sup>14</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2008), 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> McCarthy, *Ottoman Turks*, 286.

<sup>17</sup> Yücel Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 1 (2008), 56-57.

The aim of the reform period was to modernize the Ottoman Empire so that it could remain a powerful entity and level with the European powers. The realization and need for modernity gave rise to this period of reformation, known as the *Tanzimat* period, which lasted from 1839 to 1876.<sup>18</sup> Throughout this period the Ottomans reorganized their administrative, political and economic institutions according to European models. European experts and advisors were brought in to help carry out these reforms.<sup>19</sup> During this period a new military medical school, a military school, and a faculty of administrative sciences were also established. It is important to mention that the purpose of these new institutions was to only adopt Western technology. The reformists did not want to become westernized in culture, but rather felt that by emulating the West, they could secure their territorial integrity and remain a superpower.<sup>20</sup> Although the Ottomans did not intend on only emulating Western values, Western ideas and practices also spread with the adoption of European technologies and secular institutions.

In the army military schools from example, “studying modern medicine, biology, and physics almost inevitably induced a rationalist and positivist mentality in the students, and the army medical schools spawned an extraordinary number of reformist thinkers...”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, many of the textbooks that were used for learning military engineering were in fact written in European languages, especially French. Therefore in

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<sup>18</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, *Ottoman Turks*, 287.

<sup>20</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 57.

<sup>21</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (London: Tauris, 1995), 46.

order to learn this new material, knowledge of a European language was required. Learning to read in a European language now meant that in addition to the science textbooks, the students could now read all sorts of European literature, including political philosophy. Thus, “the new opening to West brought with it philosophy, literature, and history, not only technology. For students it was a short step from volumes on technology to volumes on revolution.”<sup>22</sup> Although the modernization period started out as a short term project intended to save the Ottoman Empire, the changes introduced during the Tanzimat slowly transformed the social fabric of Ottoman society and led to the emergence of new political movements.

Although the Tanzimat reformers failed to achieve their ultimate goal of saving the Ottoman Empire from further disintegration; it nonetheless had a long term effect on the empire. The Young Ottomans, the Islamists, and the Young Turk movements were all a product of the Tanzimat period. The Young Ottomans were part of the first opposition movement that was highly critical of the regime. They particularly criticized the Tanzimat reforms and felt that they were “superficial imitations of Europe that disregarded traditional Ottoman and Islamic values.” The Young Ottomans felt that the reforms not only failed to save the empire but they also made the empire submissive to European interests. They believed the best way to keep the empire from dissolving was to incorporate both Islamic and European values.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the Young Ottomans, a

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<sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Ottoman Turks*, 288.

<sup>23</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 57.

second opposition movement also emerged as a result of the Tanzimat reform. Members of this group, unlike the Young Ottomans, solely emphasized Islamic values.

The new group that opposed the reforms of the Tanzimat period was the Islamists who believed that in order to save the cultural identity of the Ottoman Empire, Islamic values had to be brought back. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was the main advocate of this idea; he saw Islam as the cement that would hold the population together.<sup>24</sup> The reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II combined with the changing internal and external environment were the main contributing factors in the solidification of an Islamic identity within the disintegrating Ottoman state. After the 1878 war, it was easy to advocate an Islamic identity because the Muslims dominated what was left of the Ottoman Empire. As Russia and Europe successfully annexed Ottoman territory, Muslim refugees from the Balkans, Russian states, and other territories that were now under European rule, flooded into what was left of the Ottoman state. Sultan Abdul Hamid took this opportunity to consolidate his power and promote Islamic nationalism.<sup>25</sup> His goal was to promote Islamic ideologies in order to prevent the spread of European ones that has began in the Tanzimat era. Abdul Hamid and members of this Islamic movement were however unsuccessful in achieving this goal, particularly because they were faced with immense opposition from Young Turks, who were part of the new generation of Western elites.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>25</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 44.

The Tanzimat reforms had also created a new generation of military bureaucrats who were educated in the secular educational system that was established in that period. The Young Turks were members of this new generation which was enlightened by the secular and materialist ideas of the West. The Young Turks vehemently opposed the absolutism of Sultan Abdul Hamid II's rule and his Islamic ideas. They were strongly influenced by their learning of European ways and honored the reforms carried out during the Tanzimat. They in fact advocated for more Western institutions. Unlike the Young Ottomans and the Islamists they were ready to discard the empire's Islamic and traditional values.<sup>26</sup> The Young Turk movement sparked the "tug of war between conservatives and modernists," which still lasts in contemporary Turkey. They frequently demanded the implementation of Western reforms but were opposed by the Islamists who accused them of alienating themselves from their own cultural and religious values.<sup>27</sup>

1889, due to suppression from Abdul Hamid, members of the Young Turks fled to France where they established the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). The Committee of Union and Progress had a new modern and western agenda in mind for the Ottoman Empire. In 1908 they led the Young Turk Revolution against Abdul Hamid and took control of the government.<sup>28</sup> Once in power they established a constitutional regime, severely restricted the authority of the sultan, and began to secularize the judicial and educational system, with the intention of undermining the old Islamic establishment. The Young Turks however were unsuccessful in fully achieving their goal of transformation,

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<sup>26</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 58.

<sup>27</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 14.

<sup>28</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 58.



mainly because World War I broke out and Turkey fought the war on the losing side.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the Young Turks movement was unquestionably important, because the reforms initiated in this period paved the way for Kemal Ataturk, the creator and westernizer of modern Turkey. According to Stephen Kinzer, “[the Young Turks] built a rich tradition of dissent that shaped the intellectual and political life of the late Ottoman period and laid the foundation for Ataturk’s revolution.”<sup>30</sup> The Kemalist revolution that began in the early 1920s was an inevitable result of the modernization efforts that had begun in the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

### **Ataturk & the Kemalist Reform Era**

Modern-day Turkey owes its existence to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who ruthlessly transformed the nation and created the Republic of Turkey from the remaining ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Ataturk believed that Turkey had fallen behind the West and thus needed to become modernized as quickly as possible. He blamed the Ottoman Empire’s decline on Islam and the religious values that had become so deeply embedded in Turkish society throughout its Ottoman past. Ataturk despised these traditional values and once in power he was willing to do everything to destroy them. In order to understand Kemal’s views it is important to briefly examine his past.

Mustafa Kemal was born in 1881 in Salonika- modern-day Thessaloniki--to a traditional Muslim family with modest means. His father died while he was young and he

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<sup>29</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 76.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Kinzer, *Reset: Iran, Turkey, and America's Future*, (New York: Times, 2010), 13.

was brought up by his mother. Like many Turkish mothers, she encouraged her son to attend Quranic school and become a religious teacher. Mustafa Kemal however was a rebellious young man and had no interest in religious teachings. Instead, Mustafa Kemal decided to enroll in military school.<sup>31</sup> As a cadet he lived in Istanbul, which was one the world's most diverse and vibrant cities at the time. On his way to new posts he was also able to travel to Europe and experience other modern capitals. As a man born in the West, Mustafa Kemal had known only modern cosmopolitan cities. Furthermore, as a young officer, Kemal was infatuated with Western ideas. He learned French and spent his time reading Voltaire and Rousseau, and translated works of John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hobbes. This exposure to Western writings deeply impacted his worldview and inflamed his desire to save his country and bring it up to the standards of the Western civilization. 'The Turkish nation has fallen far behind the West. The main aim should be to lead it to modern civilization,' he told an officer in Germany.<sup>32</sup> As Kemal Ataturk rose through the military ranks, he made this his personal goal.

Ataturk's resistance against the old Ottoman establishment began with his participation in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 as a military officer in which he fought alongside the Young Turks and helped overthrow Sultan Abdul Hamid.<sup>33</sup> It was during Sultan Abdul Hamid's rule that the Ottoman Empire became known as the "sick man of Europe," and Kemal Ataturk was determined to change that. However, it was not

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<sup>31</sup>Stephen Kinzer, *Crescent and Star: Turkey between Two Worlds*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

his participation in the Young Turk Revolution, but rather his victorious role in the Turkish War of Independence, that won him recognition and legitimacy. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Mustafa Kemal was determined to save what was left of the territory from the hands of the Allied forces. In the Turkish War of Independence in 1919, Kemal successfully defeated the Allies in Anatolia and drove out the Greeks from the west and the Armenians from the east. Another important accomplishment under commander Kemal was his ability to convince the Allies to discard the Sèvres Treaty, which essentially gave the Allies the right to carve out what was left of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in World War I. Under this treaty, Turkish territory would be given to Greece, France, Britain, Italy, and the Armenians and Kurds would also obtain land in order to form their own states in the east, leaving only central Anatolia for the Turks. By replacing the Sèvres Treaty with the Treaty of Lausanne, Mustafa Kemal was able to reclaim the land that was awarded to Greece, Italy, the Kurds, and the Armenians. Having saved Turkish territory from the constant nibbling of Christian powers, Mustafa Kemal readily abolished the Ottoman monarchy and established the Republic of Turkey in 1923.<sup>34</sup> Now that Mustafa Kemal had dismantled the monarchy and consolidated power as the first president of the Turkish Republic, he was ready to fully unleash the drastic reforms that would forever change the nation.

Kemal Ataturk despised Islam and Turkey's Ottoman past and was willing to do everything in his power to prevent the old Ottoman traditions from becoming a part of its secular future. His main aim was for Turkey to become part of the 'contemporary

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 39-42.

civilization' and by that he meant the Western civilization. Ataturk strongly believed that in order for the Republic of Turkey to join the Western civilization, Turks had to become modern, secular, and fully European in every aspect. For Ataturk this meant the complete purging of Ottoman institutions and the Islamic religion. Ataturk viewed Islam as the main cause of social, political, and economic decline. He equated Islam with backwardness and found "civilization" and "Islam" to be two conflicting terms.<sup>35</sup>

Once in power he began his ruthless Westernization movement by first abolishing the caliphate, the most sacred institution of the Ottoman Empire. This crushing blow to Islam was followed by the suspension of Islamic courts and the dissolution of religious academic schools. Ataturk also repealed the constitutional clause which stated that Islam was the religion of the Turkish state. His reforms however did not stop there. Kemal Ataturk also attacked traditional clothing, by banning the fez and veil, which were both symbols of Muslim identity. He also replaced the Muslim calendar with the Christian one, and introduced a new language that was based off of Latin, completely altering the old Turkish language which had Persian and Arabic roots.<sup>36</sup> Kemal Ataturk mercilessly wiped away the traditional values of Turkish life that had taken centuries to build, forcefully establishing Kemalism as the state's official ideology.

Kemalism referred to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's reforms and ideology which became the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. According to Ömer Taspınar, Kemalism rests upon two pillars that fully define its ideology. The first pillar of

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<sup>35</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 61.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 63.

Kemalism is a “revolutionary and militant version of secularism” and the other is “assimilationist nationalism.”<sup>37</sup> In line with the first pillar, Kemalism was a state-enforced secular revolution in values and institutions. The aim was to root out Islam for state institutions and fully control the religious sphere to avoid further decay of the Turkish nation. The second pillar of “assimilationist nationalism,” meant the rejection of the Ottoman concept of multinationalism and an emphasis on ‘Turkishness.’ This pillar rested on the belief that in order for the new Turkish Republic to be a successful nation all of its citizens had to be assimilated. Thus, anyone who lived within the border of the Republic had to consider themselves only as Turks. Ataturk recognized non-Muslim Turks as citizens but also discriminated against ethnic minorities, making the new Turkish Republic less tolerant than the multireligious and multinational Ottoman Empire.<sup>38</sup> This concept of Kemalism was embraced by a small group of secular elite and military officers, known as the Kemalists. However, it failed to take root among the greater population, particularly in the rural areas. The traditional masses of the rural countryside held on to their Ottoman-Islamic values and refused to accept the concept of Kemalism which deliberately aimed to destroy their Ottoman past. The Kurds, the nation’s largest non-Turkish ethnic group, especially felt resentful towards Kemalism’s secularization and assimilation efforts. For the Kurdish population the Islamic caliphate symbolized unity and harmony under the Ottomans. Now that Ataturk had abolished the caliphate and adopted “Turkishness” as the only acceptable form of identity, the “social

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<sup>37</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey’s Middle East Policies*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

contract” between the Kurds and the new Republic was broken.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, after Ataturk’s westernization reforms, there was an inherent rift between the secular Kemalist elite and the conservative masses.

Kemalism not only deeply impacted the internal dynamic of the Turkish Republic, but it also left its mark on the nation’s foreign policy. On October 29, 1923, the day after Kemal Ataturk created the Republic of Turkey he stated the foreign policy direction he wanted the nation to follow in the future:

Our object now is to strengthen the ties that bind us to other nations. There may be a great many countries in the world, but there is only one civilization, and if a nation is to achieve progress, she must be a part of this civilization... The Ottoman Empire began to decline the day when, proud of her successes against the West, she cut ties that bound her to the European nations. We will not repeat this mistake.<sup>40</sup>

However, before being able to achieve this Western foreign policy objective, Ataturk was aware that he first had to complete his domestic agenda. Thus, during the early years of the Republic, Ataturk pursued an isolationist foreign policy. After 1923 the main priority for Ataturk was to “consolidate the national independence won on the battlefield,”<sup>41</sup> and to successfully transform and reconstruct the Western state he had in mind. Furthermore, at the time the international environment was threatening to the new found Republic. The Ottoman Empire had just recently been defeated by the Allied Powers and had it not been for Ataturk the Turkish Republic would have been destroyed by the European powers before it could even be born. Also, at the time Turkey’s

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 62.

<sup>41</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 110.

neighborhood was prey to constant nibbling from European powers.<sup>42</sup> Realizing the tense international atmosphere and the reality of possible exploitation by external powers caused Ataturk to focus on his domestic efforts instead.

Although Turkey's relations with the European powers were not at its best, its relations with the Arab states were much worse. The abolishment of the caliphate by Ataturk was one of the main reasons for Turkey's break with the Muslim world. At a time when many Arab states were under European mandate control and feared that Western imperialism would wipe out their Islamic traditions, the abolishment of the caliphate by the only powerful Islamic empire was a tremendous blow to Muslims around the world. Many Arab countries felt betrayed and abandoned by Turkey given the growing Western threat in the region.<sup>43</sup> Arabs felt a strong sense of resentment towards Kemalist Turkey for willingly abandoning the traditional Islamic roots that they were trying so hard to protect. Ataturk on the other hand did not care for the Republic's relationship with the Arab world, mainly because he associated Islam and the Arab culture with the backwards society that he had tried so hard to drag it away from. As previously mentioned, Ataturk's ultimate goal was for Turkey to become part of the Western civilization and to maintain its ties with Europe. This goal however was not achieved until a decade after Ataturk's death (1938). In fact it was not until Cold War era that Turkey fully established itself in the West.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Graham E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 26.

## **The Early Cold War Era**

The Cold War era was a period of East-West division, in which Turkey firmly aligned itself with the West and severely damaged its relations with the Arab states. It is important to highlight that Turkey's NATO membership and alignment with the West was driven by its realist mentality and its security-driven objectives. Turkey's foreign policy in the early Cold War period was one dimensional and restricted due to the Soviet threat and Turkey's need for U.S. protection.

By the early 1940s, tensions rose between the aggressive Soviet Union and the Turkish Republic. It was Joseph Stalin who initiated hostility towards Turkey and damaged Turkish-Soviet relations. Stalin dissolved the 1921 Treaty of Moscow which was a "friendship pact" that settled border disputes among them. He then renewed Soviet demands for the return of Turkey's eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan. He also claimed exclusive rights over the control of Turkish straits; the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and demanded the right to establish Soviet bases in Turkey. In addition to these aggressive claims, the Soviet Union was rapidly expanding in to Eastern Europe and moving closer towards Turkish territory.<sup>44</sup> With the advent of the Cold War and the rising Soviet Power, Turkey quickly sought protection from the West.

Realizing Turkey's regional importance, Washington, reached out to Turkey in 1952 and allowed the Republic to join NATO- the Western system of alliance against the

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<sup>44</sup> Ahmad, *Quest for Identity*, 105.



Soviet threat.<sup>45</sup> NATO membership meant that Turkey was now an integral part of the Western security system and a close ally of Washington. Turkey took this opportunity to consolidate its Western identity and align its foreign policy with that of the United States. Turkey's Western element became particularly evident in its foreign policy towards the Middle East as it allowed Western demands to dominate its actions in the region. For example, in order to demonstrate its willingness to defend Western interests, Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize Israel, which was an invisible NATO member and a close ally of the U.S. Furthermore, Turkey became the main advocate of the Baghdad pact, the Washington-sponsored anti-Soviet alliance in the Middle East. Turkey helped create the Baghdad pact in 1955, which was a security agreement between the United Kingdom, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey. The goal was to deter Soviet influence in the broader Middle East. Iraq was the only Arab state that had joined the agreement (which it later abandoned after the 1958 coup); other Arab nations were either preoccupied with the Arab-Israeli conflict or had established themselves in the Soviet camp.<sup>46</sup> Turkey's anti-Soviet stance and Western alignment caused much hostility from the Arab states who accused Turkey of selling its soul to the West. A series of actions confirmed this accusation: In 1955 Turkey warned the government of Jordan that if it failed to join the Baghdad pact, Turkey would align itself with Israel against Jordan; in the same year Turkey voted against Algeria's independence at the United Nations; in 1957, concerned about the possibility of the communists gaining power in Damascus, Turkey massed troops along its shared border with Syria and threaten to invade the

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 34.

country.<sup>47</sup> These actions not only reaffirmed Turkey's Western orientation, but also further deteriorated its relations with the East.

The international dynamics of the Cold War and the serious security threats Turkey faced from the expanding Soviet Union, caused Turkey to seek protection under the Western security umbrella. Turkey's NATO membership certainly increased its Western credentials; however its move towards the West was not so much driven by ideology as it was by security concerns. Once Turkey entered the Western camp, it allowed Western policy, particularly U.S. policy, to completely dictate its international relations. This resulted in further restriction of Turkey's foreign relations, because in addition to losing its eastern neighbors in the Caucasus and Central Asia to Soviet expansion, Turkey's relations with the Arab states were also severely damaged. Given the international environment, and the Soviet threat, Turkey sided with the West in order to ensure its nation's protection, this move hurt Turkey's eastern relations, but won Turkey western legitimacy.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

## **CHAPTER 2- Domestic Tensions & the Battle for Turkey's Soul**

The end of single-party rule brought about an intriguing problem within Turkey, one that persisted for half a century. In 1950, for the first time in Turkish history, the Kemalists (the secular elite and the military who espouse Ataturk's ideology of nationalism and secularism) introduced democratic rule, however ironically enough, they then spent the next fifty years repressing it. The Kemalist elite overthrew four democratically elected governments and continuously intervened in politics in protection of the Kemalist ideology and ultimately their own self interest. Through their constant meddling in politics, the Kemalists' managed to marginalize the majority of the population who grew increasingly disillusioned with the state ideology and its repressive measures. By the 80s and 90s changes within Turkish society led to the empowerment of the traditionally conservative masses and the emergence of Islamic political parties. The Islamic political parties represented an alternative to Kemalism and thus won the support of the disillusioned masses.

The Republican People's Party (RPP), the political party of Ataturk and the Kemalist elite, ruled the country for nearly three decades.<sup>48</sup> Kemalism was the main ideology of the RPP and the Kemalists were its official guardians. As previously mentioned, the

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<sup>48</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 116.

Kemalists were the secular elite and the Turkish military who had helped Ataturk create the new Turkish Republic. The secular elite included security officers, Western women, judges, bureaucrats, professors, media owners, journalists and newspaper editors, who strongly supported the secular nature of the state.<sup>49</sup> For decades they monopolized the most important institutions of the state and had the instruments of power under their control. The army, the judiciary, newspapers, and the media were dominated by the Kemalist elite, allowing them to crush any and all movements that seemed particularly threatening to Kemalism. The Kemalist elite have a very insecure mentality in that they are constantly in fear of emerging threats; “they see threats from across every one of Turkey’s eight borders, and most dangerously, from within the country itself.”<sup>50</sup> This idea of safeguarding Kemalist principles from internal challenges made the protection of Kemalism a matter of national security for the elite class, particularly the military. By internalizing the concept of national security, the Kemalist elite were able to legitimize their role as the guardians and strengthen their hold on the state.<sup>51</sup> The Kemalists enjoyed full political dominance from 1923 to 1945. By 1945 however, the repressive tendencies of the RPP had caused widespread dissatisfaction among Turkish society.

The rural population and the traditional masses had opposed the RPP’s rule and its Kemalist ideology from the start. They felt no loyalty and connection to the RPP. The majority of the traditional population despised the secularism of the state and the top-

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<sup>49</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 12.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Ümit Cizre, "Ideology, Context, and Interest: the Turkish Military." *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Ed. Resat Kasaba, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 301.

down, forceful manner in which the Kemalist reforms were carried out. The stagnant economy under the RPP further fueled anti-government sentiment. The economic policies of the RPP were illiberal and ineffective and caused much opposition among villagers and businessmen. The villagers resented the increase in taxation and the government's inattention to the agricultural sector which pushed them further into poverty. The businessmen were especially hit hard by the increase in taxation. They opposed the RPP's economic programme because it prohibited private enterprise which the businessmen were strongly in favor of. In addition to the hostility in the general public, members within the RPP were also dissatisfied with the illiberal economic and political environment of the state. By 1945, due to widespread hostility in Turkish society and pressure from dissidents within the RPP, the government was forced to gradually open up the political system.<sup>52</sup>

In January 1946 the dissidents within the RPP formed the Democrat Party (DP). Although members of the DP were also Kemalists and upheld the Kemalism ideology of the state, they were much more liberal minded than the RPP. They favored a more open political and economic system and wanted to curtail the interventionist state and enhance the individual rights of the citizens. Realizing the serious political threat posed by the DP, the government called early elections in May 1946 in order to catch the DP off guard before they could have time to organize and win public support. This plan worked, and

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<sup>52</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 116-117.

the RPP won the 1946 elections. Even though the elections were marred by corruption, the DP managed to win 65 votes.<sup>53</sup>

Given the unfair advantage of the RPP the 1946 elections cannot be considered free elections. The Republic's first free and fair elections were in fact held in 1950. By 1950 the DP had become the "umbrella under which all who mistrusted or opposed the current government sought refuge."<sup>54</sup> In May 1950, Turkish voters expressed their resentment towards the RPP and voted the Democrat Party into office with an absolute majority.<sup>55</sup> Adnan Menderes became the Prime Minister and main representative of the DP. The fact that the RPP had allowed democratic rule and accepted the verdict of the voter, was viewed as a "turning-point in the history of modern Turkey" and a "step forward for the democratic process."<sup>56</sup> However, this change was not as dramatic as it was perceived to be. Despite the introduction of the multi-party system, the Kemalist elite were not ready to embrace democratic rule. This was in fact the beginning of a façade democracy. In the next four decades that followed, between 1960 and 2000, the Kemalists would allow democratic elections and initially accept the new government, but would then intervene and overthrow the elected officials and close down their political parties. Following the introduction of the multi-party political system, the military staged four coups (1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997), banned dozens of opposition parties, and arrested and tortured thousands of political activists.

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<sup>53</sup> Ahmad, *Quest for Identity*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 117.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>56</sup> Ahmad, *Quest for Identity*, 104.

In 1960, the military staged its first coup against the Democrat Party for easing Islamic restrictions and threatening the Kemalists political power. Adnan Menderes, who was prime minister between 1950 and 1960, was the first political leader who tested the rules of the secularist establishment. He differed from the Kemalist elite on two important matters: one was in regards to the role of military in politics and the other was secularism. Menderes favored a more relaxed secularism and preferred less military bureaucracy, both of which created unease among the elite, particularly the former.<sup>57</sup> Menderes began the transformation of the repressive and interventionist Turkish state by introducing free-market economic policies and allowing religious freedom. Unlike the Kemalists, Menderes did not feel threatened by religion and was willing to identify with Islam in order to maintain his popularity. He allowed mosques to be built and religious schools to open in many cities and Islamic books to reappear in bookshelves. He also allowed the Muslim call to prayer to be done in Arabic and repealed the law created by the RPP which required it to be chanted in Turkish. The DP also repealed the ban on religious organizations that were previously suppressed by the RPP.<sup>58</sup>

Menderes realized that his religious tolerance was winning him support and so he began to use more pro-Islam rhetoric in his political speeches. His use of Islam as a political force certainly succeeded in winning the support of the rural population. It did not however sit well with the Kemalists who saw Menderes and his Democrat Party as a grave threat to the Republic's secular foundation. This threat was magnified by internal

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<sup>57</sup> Cizre, "Ideology, Context, and Interest," 308.

<sup>58</sup> Jenny B. White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," in Resat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey, vol. 4, Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 361.

transformation of Turkish cities. Starting in the 40s and 50s there were large-scale migrations from the countryside to the cities. These migrants were the religiously conservative masses of Turkey that had long been ignored by the Kemalist elite. They brought in their religious practices along with them and contributed to the renewed visibility of Islam within Turkish cities.<sup>59</sup> The migration of the traditional masses coupled with the DP's religious concessions, caused the RPP to react to what it perceived to be the increasing Islamisation of the Turkish Republic. In 1960, the Kemalists responded by not only overthrowing the government, but also hanging the Prime Minister and two of his cabinet members on charges of treason.<sup>60</sup> The 1960 coup of Adnan Menderes was a clear warning by the Kemalist elite, that if any politician dared to bend the rules of the secular establishment, they would have to pay a high price. In addition to revealing the Kemalists' ruthlessness, the 1960 coup also revealed their ambivalence towards and fear of democracy.

Kemalists felt threatened by the introduction of democracy in the Republic because they knew maintaining the status quo would become much more difficult. Their main goal was to protect and preserve Kemalism and the secular nature of the state. Knowing that the majority of the people held on to the traditional and religious values of the Ottoman past made Kemalists increasingly hesitant in fully implementing democracy in Turkey. Many Kemalists felt that "full democracy would increase ethnic tensions, religious devotion and every form of social conflict. Even more profoundly, they believed

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>60</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 17.



it would become a weapon for those who seek to drag Turkey back to the pre-Kemalist era.”<sup>61</sup> The ruling elite also feared multiparty democracy because it meant losing power. For more than two decades after the creation of the Republic, the elite enjoyed full political autonomy as it was the only party allowed to govern. With the introduction of the multi-party system in 1950, the elite saw power slip right through its hands. The Kemalists came to the realization that now that multiparty democracy was introduced in Turkey, in order to stay in control and maintain their political power they needed to create an institution that would legitimize their role in politics.

After the 1960 military intervention, the military amended the constitution carving up a new institution, called the National Security Council, which would guarantee the military officers a direct say in political affairs of the state. The National Security Council gave the chief of staff and the armed forces the right to “assist” cabinet members ‘in making decisions related to national security and co-ordination.’ The military officers intentionally used the term ‘national security,’ not only because it legitimized their political role, but also because the term was so broad that it allowed the commanders to have a direct say in dealing with virtually all national problems that came before the government. The Constitution now allowed the military to assume executive power without being held accountable to citizens.<sup>62</sup> In the next four decades the military, backed by the Constitution, used its executive power to further monopolize and control the state.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>62</sup> Feroz Ahmad, “Politics and Political Parties in Republican Turkey,” in Resat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey, vol. 4, Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 241.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Kemalists were faced with a wide range of new threats as forms of socialism, communism, Islamism, and anti-communism emerged within Turkey. A leftist party known as the Turkish Workers' Party and rightist group known as the Republican Peasants' Nation Party were formed in the 60s. Also in 1970 the first Islamist party known as the National Order Party was established. The Cold War atmosphere and the open environment in universities encouraged discourse as the emergence of new ideas led to the politicization of Turkish society. By the late 1960s extremists groups appeared on both the Left and the Right and the public gradually became polarized between the two. In late 1967 violence broke out among the leftist and rights groups as Turkey slipped into civil unrest.<sup>63</sup> The political instability and the perceived erosion of Kemalism caused the military to intervene and overthrow the government both in 1971 and 1980. The civil unrest "prompted the populace at large to give their full support to military action without worrying about its anti-democratic nature."<sup>64</sup> This further enhanced the role of the military and strengthened its sense of self-importance as the sole guardians of the Republic. The next several years that followed were marked by severe political oppression.

After the 1980 coup, the military officers dissolved the parliament and banned all political parties. Trade unions and political parties were closed down and their leaders were imprisoned and tortured. Between 1980 and 1983 alone, approximately 60,000 people were arrested for "illegal political activities" and more than one million were

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<sup>63</sup> Howard, *History of Turkey*, 143.

<sup>64</sup> Cizre, "Ideology, Context, and Interest," 310.

blacklisted.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, from 1980 to 1984, more than 300 people were “suspiciously killed,” and 171 died from being tortured in prison. In addition to political activists, journalists, judges, and university professors were also fired and imprisoned.<sup>66</sup> Anyone that the military labeled as “anti-Kemalist” or perceived to be threatening Kemalism faced similar repressive measures.<sup>67</sup> The brutal response of the military to domestic political opposition after the 1971 and 1980 coups fully revealed the military’s authoritarian streak.

After the 1980 coup the military decided that Turkey was neither ready nor worthy of democracy. In 1982 the Kemalist elite created a new constitution further limiting the democratic rights and liberties of the Turks. The section of the constitutions curtailing democratic freedoms stated:

‘fundamentalist rights and freedoms maybe restricted by law, in conformity with the letter and spirit of the Constitution, with the aim of safeguarding the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, national sovereignty, the Republic, national security, public order, general peace, the public interest, public morals and public health.’

Additionally, after every article that acknowledged freedom of speech and the press, a sentence or two was added on how these rights could be restricted ‘for the purpose of preventing crime.’<sup>68</sup> Twenty years after the second constitutional amendment, the military once again found a way to limit the rights of civilians while enhancing its own. Under

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<sup>65</sup> Sylvia Kedouri, *Turkey: Identity, Democracy, Politics*, (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 125.

<sup>66</sup> Ercan Yavuz, "Nation Set to Confront Coup Legacy," *Zaman*, September 12, 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-221402-nation-set-to-confront-coup-legacy-turkey-to-decide-today-on-trying-coup-generals.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Cizre, "Ideology, Context, and Interest," 310.

<sup>68</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 14.

this new constitution, the government was required to give ‘priority consideration’ to the decisions and recommendations of the National Security Council. The military could now formulate and implement laws pertaining to matters of national security.<sup>69</sup> In the next years that followed, the military used this power to completely depoliticize Turkey and repress the political left which it deemed particularly threatening at the time. In order to completely destroy the leftist ideology and counter its appeal the Kemalists eased the pressure on Islam. Although this tactic may have been useful in the short-term in helping the Kemalists combat communism and leftist ideologies, in the long run it proved to be counter-productive. By strengthening the role of Islam the Kemalists fueled the rise of political Islam and contributed to their own downfall.

After the 1980 coup, the military maintained control for three years and completely purged the political parties that had emerged in the 60s and 70s. With the pre-coup parties still banned, new ones were formed in order to compete in the 1983 elections. One of only three parties approved to participate in the post-coup elections was the center-right Motherland Party created by Turgut Özal.<sup>70</sup> The public knew very little about Özal and his political agenda. They did know however that unlike the leaders of the other two parties, Özal was not an ex-general and was not a representative of the Kemalist establishment. This was enough for the masses to give him a stunning victory in the 1983 national elections.<sup>71</sup> Once in power, Özal unleashed a set of political and economic reforms that transformed Turkey into a liberal and democratic country. The

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<sup>69</sup> Ahmad, “Politics and Political Parties in Republican Turkey,” 254.

<sup>70</sup> Howard, 165.

<sup>71</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 131.

fact that Özal was anti-Communist made the generals less fearful of his government and his domestic agenda which was very religiously tolerant. While in power with support from the military which was promoting a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” that would counter the appeal of leftist ideology, Özal strengthened the role of Islam. In the 1980s under Özal’s government 1,500 new mosques were built every year. By 1988 there was a mosque for every 857 people in Turkey. Özal also allowed conservative Muslims to obtain positions in ministries and state bureaucracies.<sup>72</sup> In addition to his social and political policies, Özal also carried out economic reforms.

Özal completely transformed Turkey’s protectionist and “inward-looking” economy. He introduced liberal free-market policies and turned Turkey into an export-oriented state which helped the Turkish economy experience growth after years of stagnation.<sup>73</sup> Özal also decreased bureaucratic procedures and allowed business to flourish in Turkey. Before he came to power, opening up a business was a torturous bureaucratic process. Now anybody could easily start their own business, and hundreds of thousands of people did. Industries were privatized and Turkey became a consumer society.<sup>74</sup> Özal’s political and economic reform package gradually weakened the position of the Kemalist establishment because it removed the state’s control over the economy. His reforms empowered the traditionally conservative masses instead.

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<sup>72</sup> White, “Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey,” 363.

<sup>73</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 127.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Özal's reforms liberated the traditional masses that were now freer to practice their religion, open up businesses, publish and broadcast Islamic ideas and obtain government positions. Özal's free-market policies strengthened the role of conservative Muslims by elevating their economic status. Entrepreneurship and business flourished in a number of Turkish cities that used to be economically stagnant. Thanks to his economic liberalization, "sleepy backwaters" of Turkey became known as the 'Anatolian Tigers,'<sup>75</sup> and a new class of conservative businessmen emerged. The businessmen of the Anatolian tigers would later on become the support base for Islamic political parties. The conservative population now had more economic and political tools at its disposal and was thus able to make its demands known. Özal's reforms empowered three varied groups within Turkey: the Muslim business class of the Anatolian tigers, the lower classes in the cities, and the Islamic intellectual class.<sup>76</sup> By allowing these groups to have a stronger voice in Turkish society, Özal's political and economic liberalization provided the grounds for the rise of Islamic political parties.

The 1980s marked the beginning of the long-lasting power struggle between the Islamists and Kemalists. The first Islamic political leader that seriously confronted the Kemalist establishment was Necmettin Erbakan, who in the 80s was known as the unchallenged leader of the Islamic political movement."<sup>77</sup> Necmettin Erbakan established the first Islamic political party, called the National Order Party in 1970. However, its

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<sup>75</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 132.

<sup>76</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 49.

<sup>77</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 65.

existence was short-lived as it was among the parties banned after the 1971 coup. In 1980, Erbakan restarted the party under a new name, the National Salvation Party.<sup>78</sup> Once again it was dissolved after the 1980 coup. In the 70s Erbakan was not seen as a serious threat and his political moves were overshadowed by the violence that broke out between the Left and the Right. Thus, it was not until the 80s that he really began to politically challenge Kemalism. In 1983, Erbakan reentered the political scene and formed a third party, known as the Welfare Party (WP).<sup>79</sup> The liberal environment of the 80s under Özal allowed Erbakan to strengthen his political stance and expand his support base.

In the 80s the Erbakan's Welfare Party became very popular, particularly among the traditional rural masses that were in search of a party that would represent their Islamic identity and meet their basic needs. Erbakan vehemently spoke out against Kemalism and called for a return to Islamic values. He promised the elimination of social inequality and corruption, which was rampant among the Kemalist elite. The party's growing popularity became evident in the 1990s. In the 1994 municipal elections, the WP won twenty eight mayoral seats (out of the seventy six) in provincial capitals. What particularly shocked the Kemalists was that Islamists were elected in Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey's largest cities. The Welfare Party also won the most votes in the 1995 national election.<sup>80</sup> The core of Erbakan's support base included conservative Muslims who voted him into

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<sup>78</sup> White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 362.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 366.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 367.

office. However, he also gained votes from those who were not particularly religious. Erbakan's diverse proponents had different views on the role of Islam in politics. All they really had in common was a shared feeling of disillusionment with the Kemalist establishment. While the Kemalist elite were known for their dishonesty and corruption, Welfare Party mayors and politicians, whom led modest lives were known as the only honest, caring, and socially conscious party in Turkey.<sup>81</sup> The WP's electoral success and wide-spread popularity fueled a sense of insecurity among the Kemalist elite who felt that the party posed a serious threat to the secular nature of the state.

Erbakan's foreign policy views were particularly provocative and unacceptable to the Kemalist elite. A few weeks before the 1995 election, Erbakan gave fiery speeches promising to launch a jihad and recapture Jerusalem from the Zionists and save Turkey from the 'unbelievers of Europe.' He also pledged to 'create an Islamic currency, an Islamic United Nations, and Islamic NATO, and an Islamic version of the European Union.'<sup>82</sup> Erbakan's anti-Israel and anti-West rhetoric and reference to pan-Islamic ideas led Kemalists to believe that the Welfare Party would reorient Turkish foreign policy away from the West towards the Islamic Middle East. With the elections getting closer, the secularists and the leading military officials feared that their worst nightmare would come true and an Islamic party would finally rule the government and destroy its secular identity at home and its Western oriented foreign policy abroad. Thus the Kemalist elite felt the need to immediately act and stop what they perceived to be the Islamisation of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 371.

<sup>82</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 68.



Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. Although the Welfare Party came out of the 1995 election with the most votes, the Kemalist elite forcefully brokered a coalition government between two center-Right parties that had initially split up, in order to prevent Erbakan from becoming prime minister. However, the two center-right parties once again split up, and the military imposed coalition collapsed. Erbakan, determined to seize power, formed a coalition government with the True Path Party,<sup>83</sup> as the army watched Erbakan became Turkey's first Islamic-oriented prime minister.

As Prime Minister, Erbakan implemented some of his foreign policy ideas and began developing closer ties with Islamic countries. He made trips to Iran and Libya supporting Islamic leaders in the hope that Turkey would soon regain the Islamic leadership position it held as the main protector of the Muslim caliphate.<sup>84</sup> In addition to his foreign policy he was also proactive in his domestic policies. Once in power, radical elements of the WP gradually became evident which further heightened Kemalists' distrust of the party. In one instance WP members tried to oust secular-minded judges and replace them with Islamist judges. Also, attempts were made by WP parties to separate men and women on transportation systems. Also, several educational centers for women were closed down and sometimes replaced with Quranic schools.<sup>85</sup> By 1997, the Kemalist elite had seen enough and was fully determined to find a way to overthrow the Welfare Party.

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<sup>83</sup> Cizre, "Ideology, Context, and Interest," 310.

<sup>84</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 70.

<sup>85</sup> White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 368.

On February 4<sup>th</sup> 1997, an event that was hosted by a Welfare Party mayor, a follower of Erbakan, triggered the fourth coup. On this day the Iranian ambassador was invited to an Islamic rally in Sincan, where he demanded sharia law in Turkey. 'Do not be afraid to call yourself fundamentalists! Fundamentalists are those who follow the words and actions of the Prophet,' he shouted to the Turks. For the Kemalist elite this was the "last straw." The following day, the military responded by sending in tanks through the streets of Ankara into Sincan as a clear sign that the end was near for the Welfare Party.<sup>86</sup> On February 28<sup>th</sup> 1997, the government was forced to sign a list of military demands agreeing to fully adhere to and protect the secularist ideology of the Republic. In the months that followed, the Kemalists tightened the pressure on Erbakan by launching a national campaign against political Islam and issuing several warnings against his government. The pressure eventually led to the resignation of Erbakan in what became known as the "post-modern coup." In 1998 the Kemalists dissolved the Welfare Party and banned Erbakan from political activity for five years.<sup>87</sup> The 1997 post-modern coup had a significant impact on Turkey's Islamic political movement. According to Omer Taspinar, it "paved the way for soul-searching among Turkey's Islamists, eventually causing a generational and ideological rift within their movement."<sup>88</sup> The WP's persecution convinced the reformist wing of the party to strengthen its moderate views and distance itself from the party's Islamist agenda.

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<sup>86</sup> Kinzer, *Crescent and Star*, 74.

<sup>87</sup> White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 368.

<sup>88</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 12.

Tayyip Erdoğan officially entered the political scene in 1994 when he won the mayoral seat in Istanbul in the 1994 municipal elections. As mayor he had built up a reputation as a charismatic and populist leader and was credited by the public for improving services. When the Welfare Party was formally banned in 1997, Erdoğan along with other Islamic politicians joined the Virtue Party (VP), which was the successor the WP.<sup>89</sup> Erdoğan's role in the Virtue Party was short-lived however as he was banned from politics in 1998 by the National Security Court for reciting a verse from an old Turkish poem. During a campaign speech, Erdoğan read the verse: 'the mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets are our spears, and the faithful are our army.' The army which was already looking to come up with a case against Erdoğan and members of the Virtue Party seized on this old poem, claiming that it revealed Erdoğan's intention of destroying secularism. As a result, Erdoğan was convicted, banned from politics, and sentenced to then months in jail.<sup>90</sup> The Kemalists kept up the fight against the Virtue Party. They opened up a case against the VP in 1991 and closed down the party in June 2001.<sup>91</sup> This was a turning point for Tayyip Erdoğan and the moderate members of the Islamic party who had learned that in order to avoid being persecuted they had to solidify their moderate views and abandon the Virtue Party.

Despite being constitutionally barred from participating in politics, Erdoğan continued to manage the political affairs of the reformist faction. He was determined to reenter the political scene. In August 2001, Erdoğan and Abdullah Gul, another moderate

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<sup>89</sup> White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 372.

<sup>90</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 133.

<sup>91</sup> White, "Islam and Politics in Contemporary Turkey," 374.

Islamic leader, founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP).<sup>92</sup> Abdullah Gul took up the leadership position while Erdoğan worked behind the scenes. With the national elections less than a year away, the AKP launched a successful grass-root political campaign. The AKP distanced itself from the anti-secular and anti-Western stance of the past Islamic parties and instead campaigned as a ‘conservative democratic party’ and advocated for political freedom, economic liberalism, and human rights. AKP policies blended in elements of Islam, capitalism, and democracy, something no secular party in Turkey had ever done. Also unlike Erbakan, AKP leaders emphasized the importance of Turkey’s relations with the West and even promised to pursue Turkey’s EU membership. AKP’s moderate Islamic views and pro-market and pro-EU stance won the support of the Turkish population. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002, only fourteen months after its creation, AKP won Turkey’s national elections, obtaining 34% of the vote, forming the first majority government in decades.<sup>93</sup> Soon after gaining power, AKP lawmakers lifted the ban on Erdoğan, clearing his path to the prime minister's seat. In the July 2007 elections Erdoğan’s AKP proved to be even more victorious and popular, winning more than 46% of the vote.<sup>94</sup> Erdoğan’s ‘conservative democratic party’ has been able to successfully rule Turkey for almost a decade now without military intervention.

After coming to power in 2002, Erdoğan launched an impressive reform package, which has transformed Turkey into a vibrant and prosperous democratic nation. Through

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>94</sup> “Turkey Country Profile,” *BBC News*, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/1022222.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1022222.stm).

its economic reforms, AKP has put an end to Turkey's macroeconomic instability. Turkey's economic growth rate has been steady and strong, and trade and foreign investment values have shot up. Even more impressive are the constitutional reforms that the AKP has carried out. Through its constitutional amendments Erdoğan has undermined the power of the Kemalist elite, particularly the military. In 2003, Erdoğan altered the National Security Council, the military's most important institution. He reduced the number of officers on the Council from five to one, brought in civilians, and ultimately took away the officer's executive power.<sup>95</sup> The most astonishing reform that deliberately limited the role of the military was just recently passed in 2010 through Turkey's referendum.

On September 12, 2010, AKP won a landmark referendum which introduced 26 constitutional amendments to the 1982 constitution that was created by the Kemalist elite after the 1980 coup.<sup>96</sup> Some of these amendments include collective bargaining rights, privacy rights, gender equality, and protection for children, veterans, the elderly, and the disabled. The reform package also includes provisions that: empower civilian courts while reducing the jurisdiction of military courts, remove immunities provided to the generals responsible for the 1980 military coup, and changes the procedures for banning political parties, and alters the composition of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme

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<sup>95</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 134.

<sup>96</sup> Dan Bilefsky, "Turkish Reforms Pass by Wide Margin," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/13/world/europe/13turkey.html>.

Board of Judges and Prosecutors to check the power of the military elite.<sup>97</sup> The fact that the referendum decreased the power of the military and also coincided with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1980 military coup caused much controversy among the Kemalist elite who strongly opposed the constitutional amendments. They interpreted the referendum as an “orchestrated power grab aimed at undermining the secular order.” The AKP and its supporters however, view the referendum as the liberalization of the Turkish political order. They argue that the amendments go a long way to make Turkey a democratic nation and that the curtailing of the military is a good thing for Turkish democracy. Erdoğan himself has asserted that “the main message out of the ballot boxes is that our nation said yes to advanced democracy, yes to freedoms, yes to the superiority of law — not the law of the superiors — and yes to the sovereignty of national will.”<sup>98</sup> It is not surprising that the Kemalist elite feel threatened by these amendment changes. The referendum without a doubt cripples the power of the old Kemalist elite.

The secular elite and the military have monopolized the state institutions for decades and have suppressed democracy in order to maintain their power. The fact that Turks approved the reforms suggests strong support for the liberalization of the military-dominated constitution and the need for more democratic institutions. By approving the changes, many Turks demanded an end to the military’s constant intervention. “The

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<sup>97</sup> Asli U. Bali, "Unpacking Turkey's "Court-Packing" Referendum," *Middle East Report Online*, November 5, 2011, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero110510.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Bilefsky, "Turkish Reforms Pass by Wide Margin."

depth of support for the referendum reflects a generational shift and the anti-military orientation” of the majority of the population in Turkey, Asli Bali has concluded in his analysis of the 2010 referendum. Asli Bali also suggests the “end of guardianship” for the military as a result of amendments.<sup>99</sup>

No one has been able to challenge the Kemalists’ monopoly of power as successfully as the AKP. The AKP government has won the battle for Turkey’s soul. It has overthrown and weakened the old Kemalist establishment and its actions have been backed by the majority of Turkish people. The Kemalists contributed to their own downfall through years of military intervention and political repression. Their constant meddling in politics and resistance to change led to the marginalization of the masses who were dissatisfied with Kemalism and the secular elite’s inability to meet their demands. Changes on the domestic scene allowed Islamic parties to enter the political scene and contributed to the rise of a provincial middle class that was much more conservative and traditional than the old elite, who governed the country under a strict secular establishment. The AKP, a product of the transformation of Turkish political Islam, became the political representative of the new empowered traditional masses, which found the party’s democratic and conservative stance particularly appealing. As the Turkish-American scholar Hakan Yavuz has stated, “now the [masses] are not a subject but an object of their own destiny. They do not want to be defined by the state but

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<sup>99</sup> Bali, "Unpacking Turkey's "Court-Packing" Referendum."

seek to define the state instead.”<sup>100</sup> They have expressed their dissatisfaction with the rigid Kemalist state ideology and have willfully chosen the AKP as their representative. Since its rise to power in 2002, the AKP has remained loyal to its “conservative democracy” label by initiating reforms that have both restored the role of Islam in Turkish society and have limited the power of the military, the main opposing force against change and democracy.

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<sup>100</sup> M. Hakan, Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 17.



## CHAPTER 3 – Turkey’s Relations with the West

### Turkey and Europe

Turkey’s Europeanization efforts date back to its Ottoman past. As previously mentioned, it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century that the Ottomans began to look towards Europe in order to save the Empire from further decline. Faced with technologically advanced and superior European powers, the Ottomans began to adopt their use of science and technology and established similar Western institutions. During the Tanzimat period especially, demands for modernization led to the emulation of the “material aspects of Western civilization.”<sup>101</sup> This process of Europeanization was radically accelerated in the early twentieth century with the creation of the Turkish Republic under Kemal Ataturk. Ataturk’s ruthless westernization perpetuated a desire for further affiliation with the West, particularly with Europe.

Turkey was able to gradually align itself with the West as it gained membership in some of the most important European and transatlantic institutions. Turkey became a member of the Council of Europe in 1949, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1961 and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 1973.<sup>102</sup> Despite membership in these major Western organizations, Turkey’s Europeanization goal remains incomplete because in spite of years of persistence and dedication, Turkey has yet to become a member of the most important

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<sup>101</sup> Bozdağlıoğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," 57.

<sup>102</sup> F. Stephen, Larrabee, Ian O. Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2003), 46.

European organization: the European Union. Turkey's road towards EU integration has been quite bumpy, long, and arduous. Turkey's official European Union accession talks began in October 2005, more than forty years after it first sought membership in the European bloc. Six years later, Turkey has yet to gain full membership and is unsure it ever will. The European Union considers Turkey's negotiation as "open-ended,"<sup>103</sup> meaning there is no guarantee that Turkey will become a full member.

Turkey first expressed interest in joining what was then the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959 when there were only six members. It signed an Association Agreement, also known as the Ankara Agreement, with EEC in 1963, which was seen as a possible stepping stone to full membership.<sup>104</sup> The main aim of the EEC at the time was economic integration, thus the Association Agreement was limited to financial and trade matters. At the time Turkey followed an inward looking and protectionist economic policy, which made its economy incompatible with that of the European Community. As Southern European nations, such as Portugal, Greece, and Spain, liberalized their economies and gained membership in the EC, Turkey failed to integrate itself into the European core. By the 1980s however, thanks to Özal's sweeping free-market reforms, Turkey began to experience economic growth and became closer to meeting membership requirements. In 1987, Özal submitted Turkey's official application for full membership. Although under Özal Turkey had made significant progress in meeting the economic

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<sup>103</sup> "EU-Turkey Relations." *EurActiv*. <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations/article-129678>, Feb 17 2011.

<sup>104</sup> Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Debating the Most Difficult Enlargement Ever," *SAIS Review* 26.1 (2006), 148.

aspects of membership, its economy was still extremely underdeveloped. Thus, in 1989 the EC rejected Turkey's membership, citing mainly economic reasons.<sup>105</sup>

The EC was still adjusting to its recent South European enlargement and felt that it would be "unwise" to consider beginning another round of enlargement at the time. The EC argued that the timing was bad given that they were preoccupied with establishing a single market by 1992 and still had internal structural problems to tackle. Additionally, they felt that Turkey would be a financial burden on the EC and weaken their economic integration capabilities. In its formal rejection of Turkey's membership, the EC stated "despite the positive features of the recent developments in Turkey... its general level of development is substantially lower than the European average."<sup>106</sup> Although political reasons were also briefly mentioned and suggestions were made on improving the human rights situation in Turkey, the main emphasize was on Turkey's underdeveloped economy.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a significant transformation in the EC's approach to enlargement which further complicated Turkey's chances of gaining membership. By the late 1980s however, the EC was no longer merely an economic organization. After the Southern enlargement which resulted in the entry of Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1986, the EC began to increasingly focus on political aspects of membership, in addition to the economic requirements. This was largely due to the fact that Greece, Spain, and Portugal were still transitioning from dictatorial regimes

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<sup>105</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 48.

<sup>106</sup> EU Commission, *Commission Opinion on Turkey's Request for Accession to the Community*, 20 December 1989, <http://aei.pitt.edu/4475/>.

and the EC considered it a priority to help stabilize democracy in these countries. Thus political stability and democratic criteria were now increasingly viewed as an essential requirement for future members. Additionally, according to Stephen Larrabee and Ian Lesser, after the Southern enlargement by the late 80s, the EC gradually transformed from being a “primarily and economic club of Northern industrialized countries,” to a European institution that now represented “shared norms, values, and codes of behavior among its members.”<sup>107</sup> This shift in EC’s focus on shared views and political norms, further separated Turkey from the pattern of political development in the rest of Europe, largely because of its domestic instability. The domestic political upheaval in Turkey heightened by the series of military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 severely undermined Turkey’s chances.<sup>108</sup> The harsh political oppression under the Kemalists and military elite further strengthened European opposition to Turkish membership who saw a country that was not only economically backwards but was also in political turmoil. As the EC formally introduced specific political criteria for membership at the Copenhagen summit in 1993, Turkey’s quest for membership became significantly more difficult.

The Copenhagen criteria now required potential member states to achieve a stable democracy, uphold the rule of law, respect human rights, and protect minority rights. These were the areas that Turkey required the most reform and the issues the Kemalists were least enthusiastic about addressing. Turkish generals and their secular comrades realized that these democratic reforms would undermine their monopoly of power and

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>108</sup> Philip Gordon, Omer Taspinar, "Turkey on the Brink," *The Washington Quarterly* 29.3 (2006), 59.

give voice to the political and social groups that they had tried so hard to suppress. Thus in public they supported Turkey's EU accession but in reality they ultimately refused to take the necessary steps to join.<sup>109</sup> As the EC (and later the EU) began to give greater weight to democratic requirements, a clear contradiction in Turkey's EU aspirations was revealed. The Kemalists were fond of the idea of joining the European bloc and solidifying Turkey's Western alliance, because for many joining the EU meant the fulfillment of Atatürk's European vision. However, since EU accession also meant political liberalization and democratization, the Kemalists deliberately ignored EU requirements.

By the late 1990s however, internal changes in Turkey sparked an appetite for EU membership. Liberal-minded politicians, businessmen, as well as religious intellectuals, began to demand a greater voice in politics and society and thus pressured the Kemalists to seriously pursue EU membership. They saw the EU accession process as the best way to complete Turkey's democratization. For the devout Muslims, membership meant greater religious freedom and for persecuted groups such as the Kurds, it meant a guarantee of cultural rights, which they were fully aware of. Political and economic advantages of EU membership were also recognized by businessmen and various politicians who were enthusiastic about liberal reforms. The Turkish parliament responded to these demands by passing a set of reforms.<sup>110</sup> However, they were not

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<sup>109</sup> Kinzer, *Reset*, 135.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

enough in convincing the EC to let Turkey in. In 1997, Turkey faced its harshest rejection ever from the European Community.

In 1997, during the Luxemburg Summit, the EU ratified the candidacy of twelve countries, including eleven East European and Baltic countries and also Cyprus. Turkey however was not acknowledged as an official candidate nor offered a timetable for accession.<sup>111</sup> Instead it was offered a vague ‘strategy of rapprochement’ and told to continue improving its human rights and treatment of minorities. The EU’s refusal in recognizing Turkey as a candidate caused a wave of outrage in Turkey. Turkey immediately limited contact with the European bloc and froze political dialogue with Europe.<sup>112</sup> Turks were especially offended because they felt that the EU was applying double standards to Turkey. It is true that Turkey at the time was far from being a full democracy but the eleven European countries that were accepted as candidate countries were not vibrant democracies either. They were also less economically advanced than Turkey.<sup>113</sup> The Turkish Prime Minister at the time, Mesut Yilmaz, responsible for cutting diplomatic ties with the EU, expressed Turkish frustration by stating: “the aspect of the Luxembourg summit that disturbed us the most is that certain Central and Eastern European countries that are behind us economically and that only began taking steps toward democracy in the last five or six years were given a status ahead of ours.”<sup>114</sup> As a

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<sup>111</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 51.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen Kinzer, "Turkey, Rejected, Will Freeze Ties to European Union," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/15/world/turkey-rejected-will-freeze-ties-to-european-union.html?src=pm>.

<sup>113</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 50.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*,

result of this rejection many Turks believed, and continue to believe, that the EU's decision was unfair and that there is an inherent prejudice towards Turkey due to the fact that it is a predominantly Muslim country and culturally different than the rest of Europe.<sup>115</sup> Turkish frustration and the sharp deterioration in Turkish-EU relations caused the EU to reconsider its decision a few years later and make amends with the Republic. In 1999, their relations were put back on track as the EU officially accepted Turkey as a candidate member at the Helsinki Summit. Although EU leaders formally recognized Turkey's candidacy, they made it clear that accession talks would not begin until Turkey met the required criteria.<sup>116</sup> The positive response revived Turkey's hopes for EU membership and led to a series of political and economic reforms under the AKP government.

After its electoral victory in 2002, the AKP government which was a supporter of democratic change and EU membership fully committed itself to the goal of EU accession. This moderate, Islamic government, whose Western credentials have constantly been questioned, turned out to be more determined than any previous political leader in achieving Turkey's EU goal. As previously mentioned, AKP leaders passed an impressive series of reforms, positively altered Turkey's judicial system, civil-military relations, and human rights record, and successfully harmonized them with European norms. AKP also implemented economic reforms with the help of IMF and the finance minister Kemal Dervis, which strengthened and stabilized Turkish economy. In October

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 52

2005, three years after coming to power, the AKP passed enough reforms that it persuaded EU leaders to formally begin membership talks with the Turkish Republic.<sup>117</sup> This significantly boosted Turkey's EU aspirations, as the Turks became closer than ever before in achieving their goal of joining the most important European bloc. However, as Turkish enthusiasm and efforts grew, EU hesitation also gained momentum.

As the Turks became more willing to meet EU criteria, Europeans grew more skeptical about allowing a Muslim country to join. Resistance from certain EU member states and their constituencies has revealed this growing opposition towards Turkey's EU membership. Eurobarometers show that the percentage of EU citizens that oppose Turkish membership has risen steadily over the past few years, and since 2005 it has exceeded 50%. In France, Germany, and Austria, more than three-quarters of the population expressed opposition towards Turkish accession.<sup>118</sup> European political leaders have also shown hostility towards Turkey's bid to join the European Union. Both President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have advocated a 'privileged partnership' for Turkey instead of full membership.<sup>119</sup> Sarkozy has outwardly refused to consider Turkey a European country on the grounds that Turkey is geographically not in Europe and that although Turkey is a "great civilization culture, it is not a European one."<sup>120</sup> The main argument against membership stems from

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<sup>117</sup> Gordon and Taspinar, *Turkey on the Brink*, 61.

<sup>118</sup> Katinka Barysch, "What Europeans Think About Turkey and Why," *Center for European Reforms*, September 25, 2007, [http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/essay\\_turkey\\_barysch\\_25sept07.pdf](http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/essay_turkey_barysch_25sept07.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: Fading European Dream," *The Economist*, October, 23 2010.

<sup>120</sup> "Nicholas Sarkozy talks with Charlie Rose," February 2, 2007, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TrNZremC\\_s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TrNZremC_s).



Turkey's religious and cultural differences from the rest of Europe. Although Turkey is a secular pro-Western country, most Europeans cannot ignore the fact that 99.8% of its population is Muslim.<sup>121</sup> Many European conservatives and nationalists feel that Turkey would dilute their European identity.<sup>122</sup> Also, given the rise xenophobia and islamophobia in Europe, many Europeans simply do not want more Muslims to reside in their country. The rising tide of islamophobia in Europe is evident in the emergence of far-right parties which have gained increasing power and influence in several European countries.

The EU's struggle in integrating its vast Muslim minority population, the current backlash against Islam and multiculturalism in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Madrid and London bombings, urban riots in France, and petty crimes involving Muslims, have fueled Islamophobia throughout Europe and further complicated Turkish-EU relations.<sup>123</sup> European are now much more cautious about allowing Muslim immigrants to enter their country. Knowing that EU membership for Turkey has the potential to cause a wave of Turkish immigrants makes many Europeans fear its entry, especially countries such as Germany which already have a huge Turkish and Kurdish population. There are currently 3.8 million Turks who live in European Union countries, of whom 1.3 million are citizens. The majority reside in Germany (2.6 million) and France (370,000).<sup>124</sup> It is not a

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<sup>121</sup> Markus Crepaz and Jurg Steiner, *European Democracies*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Longman Publishing Group, 2010), 301.

<sup>122</sup> Grigoriadis, "Turkey's Accession to the European Union," 154.

<sup>123</sup> Gordon and Taspinar, *Turkey on the Brink*, 65.

<sup>124</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 145.

coincidence that these are the two nations whose political leaders have vehemently opposed Turkey's EU membership. This rejection based on Turkey's Islamic character has not gone unnoticed among Turks who feel now, more than ever, that European fears of and prejudices against Muslims is the underlying reason for their exclusion from the EU.<sup>125</sup> This conclusion is in fact not too far from the truth. Now that Turkey has more or less met the economic and political requirements of the EU criteria, the cultural and religious argument against Turkey has proved to be much more important.

The traditional argument that Turkey is too poor to be let in to the EU no longer applies. As the Turkish President, Abdulla Gul states: "Turkey used to be known as the sick man of Europe, whereas Turkey now is the only healthy man of Europe."<sup>126</sup> This label of Turkey being the "sick man of Europe" dates back to the Ottoman Empire and has been continuously used by European politicians to refer to its stagnant economy throughout much of the Republic's existence. Today while the euro zone is in deep crisis and the economies of Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland are experiencing economic meltdowns, the Turkish economy booms. Currently Turkey is ranked by the CIA World Factbook as having the 17<sup>th</sup> highest GDP in the world,<sup>127</sup> and it is predicted by some to become the world's tenth biggest economy by 2050.<sup>128</sup> According to data obtained from the World Bank, Turkey's GDP (constant 2000 US dollar) increased from about \$251

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<sup>125</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 51.

<sup>126</sup> Mark Lander, "At the U.N., Turkey Asserts Itself in Prominent Ways," *The New York Times*, Sep 22 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/world/europe/23diplo.html>

<sup>127</sup> Turkey, *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

<sup>128</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: Anchor aweigh," *The Economist*, October, 23 2010.

billion in 2001 to approximately \$357 billion in 2009, growing at an average annual rate of 5.3% in those eight years. In 2010, Turkey's economy grew much faster than those of European Union member states. Turkey's growth rate in 2010 was reported to be an exceptional 7.3% and Turkey was ranked 16<sup>th</sup> compared to the rest of the world,<sup>129</sup> while the EU growth was only 1.8%, and it was ranked 160<sup>th</sup>.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, some forecasts suggest that in the next ten years, Turkey's economy will grow faster than any country with the exception of India and China.<sup>131</sup> Turkey's exceptional transformation and positive economic forecast is a reflection of the AKP government's impressive array of economic reforms.

In addition to the economic reforms, AKP has also remained committed to implementing political changes as well. As previously mentioned the government recently held a constitutional referendum and passed a democratic reform package which incorporated EU standards and significantly limited the military's power. Ever since Turkey first sought formal membership in 1987, the EU continuously pressed Turkey to amend its constitution in order to meet the political criteria for EU membership. Under the AKP government these democratic reforms were finally carried out. However, this referendum seems to have had very little impact on Turkey's EU accession process. In fact Turkey's membership talks have currently reached a deadlock. Out of the 35 chapters that the EU talks are divided into, 18 of them have been blocked by the EU as

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<sup>129</sup> Turkey, *The World Factbook*.

<sup>130</sup> European Union, *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ee.html>.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*.

whole.<sup>132</sup> Five chapters are blocked by France, three by Austria and Germany, and six by Cyprus.<sup>133</sup> Cyprus, in fact is now considered to be the “biggest single obstacle to Turkey’s EU hopes.”<sup>134</sup>

In order to understand why Cyprus constitutes the main obstacle to Turkey’s EU accession, a brief historical background on the Cyprus issue is essential. The island of Cyprus whose population includes both Greek and Turkish Cypriots (respectively 80% and 20%) gained its independence from Britain in 1960. Less than four years after its self-determination, violent disputes broke out between the two communities over the functioning of the government. By 1964, Turkish Cypriots were driven into enclaves by the majority Greek population. The disputes eventually caused both Greece and Turkey to intervene. In July 1974, Athens sponsored a coup and overthrew the Greek-Cypriot leader, Archbishop Makarios, in order to seize power. In response to the coup, Turkey invaded northern Cyprus that same month in order to protect the Turkish-Cypriots. The Turks took control of more than one third of the island and drove out and killed Greek Cypriots. In 1983 Turkish-controlled northern part of the island declared itself the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus; however its independence was only recognized by Turkey. Since 1974 the island has remained divided despite several rounds of UN-sponsored talks. The most serious effort at settling the dispute came in 2004, just before Cyprus’ formal entry into the EU. The UN-sponsored plan, known as the Annan Plan,

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<sup>132</sup> “A Special Report on Turkey: Fading European Dream,” *The Economist*, October, 23 2010.

<sup>133</sup> “EU-Turkey Relations.” *EurActiv*. <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-turkey-relations/article-129678>, Feb 17 2011.

<sup>134</sup> “A Special Report on Turkey: Fading European Dream,” *The Economist*, October, 23 2010.

proposed a solution for the unification of the island. Since the EU had promised the Greek-Cypriots membership before the plan was introduced, they saw no need for its acceptance. On April 2004, while 65% of Turkish-Cypriots voted in favor, an overwhelmingly high number of Greek-Cypriots: 76%, voted against the unification plan. A week later only the Greek-Cypriot controlled Cyprus was let into the EU.<sup>135</sup> This highly upset the AKP government, which was the main supporter of the Annan Plan.

AKP leaders took an enormous political risk by overturning 40 years of Turkish hostility towards Cyprus and by pressing the Turkish-Cypriots to accept the compromise. Thus, the rejection did not sit well with the Turks, in fact it further fueled hostility towards the Greek-Cypriots, who were now a member of the EU and had a powerful veto that they could use against Turkey. The fact that the EU initially claimed that any side that rejected the plan would face negative consequences, but instead rewarded the Greek Cypriots and allowed them to join the EU, angered the Turks and the Turkish Cypriots. As Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar mention, “the Turkish Cypriots still suffer from international isolation while the Greek Cypriots now try to use Cyprus's membership in the EU to extract concessions from Turkey and to continue to isolate northern Cyprus.”<sup>136</sup> Since Cyprus has become an EU member, Turkey’s chances of joining the EU have further diminished.

Today Turkey’s EU membership remains hostage to the Cyprus issue. The Greek-Cypriots have repeatedly used their veto to block several EU negotiation chapters. Many

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Gordon and Taspinar, *On the Brink*, 63.

other EU member states have also used the Cyprus dispute against Turkey and have stated that unless Turkey normalizes its relations with Cyprus, it would not be allowed to join the EU.<sup>137</sup> Turkey however feels that it made enough of an effort in 2004 and that the EU should focus instead on pressuring Cyprus to make concessions. AKP leaders are growing increasingly frustrated with the Cyprus issue and once again feel that Turkey is victim of an EU double standard.<sup>138</sup> The EU had originally promised that it would end the economic isolation of Northern Cyprus and allow direct trade between EU countries and Turkish Cypriots; however it has repeatedly failed to deliver on this promise. Even though the EU is not holding up its end of the bargain, it is now demanding Turkey to open its ports and airports to the Greek-Cypriot, before chapters can be unblocked. Turkey however refuses to do so unless the EU eases the economic isolation of the north.<sup>139</sup> With Cyprus in the EU, and many member states siding with the Greek-Cypriots, Turkey's chances of joining the EU are dwindling. Unless the Cyprus problem is resolved sometime soon, which is highly unlikely, Turkey's membership negotiation will fail to advance.

Turkey's EU future does not look promising and Turks are becoming increasingly aware of it. The constant rejection by EU member states such as France, Germany, and Cyprus, and the lack of progress made in EU negotiations has certainly had a negative

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<sup>137</sup>Nathan Morley, "EU Urges Turkey to Normalise Relations with Cyprus." *The Sofia Echo*, November 11, 2010, [http://sofiaecho.com/2010/11/11/991479\\_eu-urges-turkey-to-normalise-relations-with-cyprus](http://sofiaecho.com/2010/11/11/991479_eu-urges-turkey-to-normalise-relations-with-cyprus).

<sup>138</sup>"Turkey Complains of Double Standards in EU Bid," *EUBusiness*, September 29, 2010, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/turkey-cyprus.6bi/>.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas Seibert, "Frustration in Turkey over EU Bid," *The National*, October 9, 2010, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/europe/frustration-in-turkey-over-eu-bid>.

effect on Turkish public opinion toward EU membership. According to a recent poll by the Italian Foundation Compagnia di San Paolo and the German Marshall Fund of the United States, since 2004 support for joining the EU has dropped dramatically. In 2004, 73% of Turks said EU membership would be "a good thing." In 2010 only 38% agreed with the statement.<sup>140</sup> AKP leaders have also expressed their frustration over the EU bid. AKP leaders, including President Abdullah Gul have stated that they feel the EU has deliberately put up hurdles to block Turkey's chances of becoming a member. Just recently President Gul said: "It's clear that obstacles have been placed in front of us, but the world does not stop at the European Union."<sup>141</sup> Prime Minister Erdogan also made a similar statement at a recent news conference in Bulgaria: "Turkey is constantly being held up and various hurdles are being put in our path. This is not right." "Some hindrances are being applied for Turkey which were not applied for any other EU candidate," he also added.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, there has been very little enthusiasm for Germany and France's suggestion of establishing a "privileged partnership" instead of full membership. "Such a thing as privileged partnership does not exist...at times I feel insulted for being offered something which does not exist," said Egemen Bagis, Turkey's Europeans Affairs Minister.<sup>143</sup> The Turkish people and AKP officials are getting fed up

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<sup>140</sup> "Turks Cool to EU Membership," *Al Jazeera English*, September, 16 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2010/09/201091694436906760.html>.

<sup>141</sup> "Turkey's Gul Says European Union Access Not Crucial," *Reuters India*, Jan 27 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/01/27/idINIndia-54444420110127>.

<sup>142</sup> "Erdogan: EU Is Putting up Hurdles to Turkey's Membership," *Middle East Online*, September 5 2010, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=41720> <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=41720>.

<sup>143</sup> "Turkey's EU Bid Overshadows Angela Merkel Visit," *BBC News*, Mar 29 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8592170.stm>.

with the constant EU rejection and their patience is wearing thin. They feel that no matter what Turkey does, certain EU member states will find a way to crush its EU dream.

No one can deny the Turks' disillusionment with Europe. However despite this frustration, it would be incorrect to infer that Turkey will actually abandon its relations with the EU. AKP leaders still consider EU membership a top foreign policy priority and are aware of the economic and political benefits it will have for Turkey in the future. After acknowledging that the accession process has become very difficult, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's foreign minister assured Europeans that EU membership is still Ankara's "first and most strategic objective."<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Turkey's EU accession process has been a powerful catalyst for reform in Turkey. Although AKP leaders should be credited for carrying out the political and economic reforms that have now transformed Turkey into a strong and stable nation, the EU's influence in fueling these changes must not be forgotten. As stated in a recent article in *The Economist*, "...the EU has been the catalyst for an entire programme of social and economic reforms [in Turkey]. Even before membership talks began in October 2005, the EU was able to persuade Turkey to adopt a wide-ranging liberal, free-market and democratic agenda."<sup>145</sup> AKP leaders have especially benefited from EU's influence. Due to EU demands, the AKP government has been able to alter the constitution and diminish the power of its biggest opponent: the Kemalist military. Although the EU's influence is not as strong as

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<sup>144</sup> Adrian Michaels, "Turkey Says Joining EU Is Still Top Priority." *The Telegraph*, July 8 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/7878873/Turkey-says-joining-EU-is-still-top-priority.html>.

<sup>145</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: Anchors aweigh," *The Economist*.



it used to be, Turkey is not likely to abandon its EU relations because it greatly benefits from it especially economically. Turkey is economically anchored in the West as it receives nearly half of its trade and investment from European nations.

The EU and Turkey enjoy strong economic relations, and Turkey has significantly benefited from it. The European Custom Agreement, the EC-Turkey trade agreement signed in 1995, has been one of the main contributing factors to Turkey's growing economic prosperity.<sup>146</sup> The Customs Union Agreement gave Turkey access to the EU's single market, allowing Turkey to take advantage of free trade. Since this agreement Turkey has become a much more liberal economy and its overall level of trade openness (exports+imports/GDP) has significantly increased. According to data based on Penn World Table, Turkey's openness increased from 43% in 1995 to 67% in 2007. Furthermore the European Union is currently Turkey's top trading partner; in 2009 more than 40% of its trade was with the European Union. Not only is the EU Turkey's main trade partner but it is also its biggest foreign investor. In 2009, foreign direct investment net inflow to Turkey was more than \$8.2 billion, 60% of which came from European Union member countries. The Netherlands topped the list with \$738 million, followed by France with \$616 million. Turkey's economy is highly dependent on the EU both in terms of its foreign capital inflows and trade. Thus in order to continue its economic growth, it is important for Turkey to do what it can to pursue EU membership and maintain good relations with Europe.

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<sup>146</sup> Bilin Neyapti, Fatma Taskin, Murat Üngör, "Has European Customs Union Agreement Really Affected Turkey's Trade?" *Applied Economics*, 39:16, (2003).

It is important to mention that as much as Turkey needs the EU to complete its Western alliance and continue attracting business, the EU also needs Turkey. Turkey's impressive economic growth and stability combined with its growing regional importance have made it a more valuable strategic partner for the EU. Turkey is now an important actor in the Middle East where the EU's influence is rather weak. It has established good relations with countries like Syria and Iran as well as other Muslim countries. It is also increasingly involved in the Balkans and the Caucasus, areas which are of strategic importance to the EU. David Lidington, the UK Minister for Europe, who has vocally supported Turkish membership in to the EU, has argued that Turkey has the potential to increase the EU's global stance. According to Lidington, "Turkey's regional influence is considerable, for instance in the Balkans it has far greater leverage than many individual EU countries, and its position at the intersection of three areas of strategic importance, the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus, would contribute significantly to the European Union's growing security capabilities."<sup>147</sup> It is very likely that Turkey's rising global influence will gain the Republic more support from EU member states who are looking to enhance and strengthen EU's power.

### **Turkey and the United States**

As afore mentioned, it was during the Cold War era that Turkey and the United States solidified their relationship and became strategic allies. What brought Ankara and Washington together was the common interest in the containment of Soviet power. The

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<sup>147</sup> "Turkey's Friends in EU Raise Voices in Favor of Accession," *Zaman*, February 17, 2011, [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=235837](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=235837).

fact that Turkey was in a critical front and shared a border with the rising Soviet Union caused Washington to reach out to Ankara and embrace the Republic in its first NATO enlargement. The alliance was strategically important for both sides. From Ankara's perspective, NATO membership meant protection from the immediacy of the Soviet threat as well as consolidation of Turkey's Western credentials.<sup>148</sup> Turkey provided Washington with a strong army and allowed the United States regular access to its military bases. In return, the United States brought Turkey under its security umbrella and secured its position in the West. Although both the U.S. and Turkey significantly benefited from this relationship, at times Turkey noticed that the two nations were not equal partners and that the United States gave little consideration to Turkish interests. This became evident in the 1960s and more so in the recent decades, particularly after the First and Second Gulf War. After repeatedly finding its interests in conflict with that of the United States, Turkey has come to the realization that in order to protect its interests it has to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Although NATO membership provided vital protection against the Soviet threat, over the next two decades Turkey began to reconsider the extent of its U.S. commitment as a series of events unfolded and new factors entered the Turkish calculus. The main events that negatively impacted Turkey-U.S. relations at the time were the 1962 Cuban missile crises and the 1964 and 1974 Cyprus crises.<sup>149</sup> During the Cuban missile crisis, the United States withdrew its Jupiter missiles from Turkey in return for a Soviet

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<sup>148</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *The New Turkish Foreign Policy*, 162.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. The U.S. showed very little concern for Turkish interests and removed the missiles without any consultation with Ankara. This move shocked Ankara as it revealed for the first time the United States willingness to override Turkish national interest in order to meet its own.<sup>150</sup> Following this event was the 1964 Cyprus issue which caused Turkey to further doubt the reliability of its alliance with the United States.

Following the fighting between the Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus, the Greek-Cypriot President Makarios amended the constitution that was under the joint guarantee of Turkey, Greece, and Britain, despite strong opposition from the Turkish-Cypriots and Ankara.<sup>151</sup> Soon after this incident, U.S. President Johnson sent a letter to Turkey, which stated the Administration's disapproval of possible Turkish involvement and also warned the government that it could not count on NATO support in the event of a conflict with Greece or even with the Soviet Union. This incident provoked serious reconsideration in Ankara about the value and nature of its alliance with the United States and NATO. Some even considered withdrawing from NATO. The lack of support for the Turkish position on Cyprus particularly from the United States, which was supposed to be Turkey's main ally, revealed the need for diversity in Turkey's foreign policy. This caused Ankara to focus on improving its relations with other nations, especially the Soviet Union. Although Turkey did not withdraw from NATO or allow its relations with the U.S. to fully deteriorate, this was nonetheless the end of Ankara's "near-total pro-U.S.

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<sup>150</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 152.

<sup>151</sup> Ahmad, *Turkey: The Quest for Identity*, 146.

orientation.” In 1974 the Cyprus issue once again caused much tension between Ankara and Washington. After the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the United States banned all military sales and aid to Turkey for three years.<sup>152</sup> The 1964 and 1974 Cyprus crises were clearly low points in Turkish-American relations. During both crises, Greece, Turkey’s most serious European rival, was treated better, due in part to Greek-American domestic considerations.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, in both instances Turkey’s NATO membership and U.S. alliance proved unreliable in helping Turkey pursue its foreign policy objectives.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, another major event that negatively impacted Turkey’s perception of U.S. foreign policy was the First Gulf War. Although initially under Özal’s government Turkey fully backed U.S. efforts in the region, its aftermath left a legacy of resentment towards U.S. policy.<sup>154</sup> Turkey paid a high price for its U.S. partnership in the 1991 Gulf War. The war created a Kurdish refugee crisis and also caused Turkey billions of dollars. As part of U.S. sanctions on Iraq, Turkey cut off its economic ties including the flow of oil exports from Iraq through its pipelines. For pipeline fees alone, Turkey lost more than \$35 billion in addition to loss of revenue from trade. In addition to its economic losses, Turkey was also faced with a Kurdish refugee problem, as more than 450,000 Kurds fled Iraq and sought refuge in Turkey. This was a direct result of America’s encouragement and support of the Kurdish rebellion against

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<sup>152</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 153.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *The New Turkish Republic*, 166.

Saddam Hussein, which were then crushed by Iraqi forces.<sup>155</sup> After the refugee crisis the United States helped establish a “no-fly zone” in the north of Iraq in order to protect the Iraq Kurds. This launched the development of a *de facto* Kurdish entity in northern Iraq,<sup>156</sup> and caused much resentment in Ankara. Due to the Gulf War and U.S. efforts, the Iraqi Kurds now enjoyed a relatively autonomous area. Turkey found this gravely threatening because it feared that an independent Kurdish state would encourage Turkey’s Kurds to also fight for secession. Also in the 80s and 90s, the Kurdish problem was escalating within its own borders and Turkish military forces were in constant battle with the Kurdish insurgent group, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party), which was demanding separation from Turkey.<sup>157</sup> The threat of Kurdish separatism in Turkey, the Turkish military’s fight against the PKK, and Ankara’s overall fear of Kurdish nationalism caused suspicion towards U.S. policy and its intentions vis-à-vis the Kurds. Many Turks feared that by supporting the Kurds, Washington’s ultimate goal was to destabilize Iraq and gain influence in the region.<sup>158</sup> The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 further intensified this suspicion.

Given that the United States had successfully overthrown Saddam’s government, there was greater potential for the creation of an independent Kurdish state, which for Turkey meant the possible break-up of the Republic. Witnessing the gains made by Iraqi

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<sup>155</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey’s Middle East Policies*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Ioannis N. Grigoriadis. "Friends No More? The Rise of Anti-American Nationalism in Turkey," *The Middle East Journal*, 64:1 (2010), 53.

<sup>157</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey’s Middle East Policies*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 154.

Kurds towards autonomy during the 1991 Gulf War, this idea did not seem unlikely. Turkey opposed the United States' war in Iraq from the start. This became evident in March 2003, when Turkey refused to allow U.S. troops to transit Turkey on their way to invade Iraq. This unwillingness to allow the United States access to Turkish bases and its outright objection to the war severely impacted U.S.-Turkish relations. Given that during the 1991 Gulf War, Turkey deployed 100,000 troops along its border with Iraq, and allowed the U.S. to use its Turkish bases,<sup>159</sup> its reaction against the Iraq War was shocking to the United States. However, after the negative impact the Gulf War had on Turkey, its response is not unreasonable. Also the Gulf War was an eye-opening experience for Turkey as it came to the realization that U.S. policy in the region might undermine its own interests. Ankara's main concern was with northern Iraq, it wanted to keep the Kurds from gaining independence and the PKK from establishing safe havens in the region. The United States however, was concerned about overthrowing Saddam Hussein and strengthening its own position by gaining the support of the minority Kurds who would help weaken the centralized character of Saddam's regime. Realizing the lack of common interest in regards to the Kurds, Turkey gradually distanced itself from U.S. foreign policy in Iraq.

The AKP government's disapproval of the War in Iraq was not because of its Islamic character and inherent hostility toward the West, but rather it was a strategic response, one based on its past experiences and current interests. Furthermore, a secular Kemalist party might have been more likely to oppose the war given the Kemalists'

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<sup>159</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies* 10.

distrust of Kurdish nationalism. It has been the nationalists and the army that have historically been the main suppressors of Kurdish rights. The AKP has actually tried harder than any previous government in normalizing its relations with the Kurds.<sup>160</sup> Also, a poll in 2003 revealed that the AKP government held more moderate views towards the U.S. than the right-wing National Movements Party, which is a nationalist party, and the left-of-center Republican Peoples Party, the main political representative of Kemalism.<sup>161</sup> Thus, the disapproval of U.S. actions is not unique to the AKP government. In fact many Turks opposed the war in Iraq and were highly supportive of AKP's response. This does not however take away from the fact that Turkey's vote against allowing the U.S. to use its territory to invade Iraq shocked Washington and severely damaged their bilateral relations.

Washington's frustration with AKP's decision was enormous. The Bush Administration felt that Turkey should have helped its traditional strategic ally despite its concerns over the Iraqi Kurds. In the aftermath of the War, some even blamed Turkey the Iraqi insurgency on Turkey's refusal to allow U.S. troops to enter Turkey from the north. Three years after the war, Donald Rumsfeld, the U.S. Secretary of Defense stated: 'had we been successful in getting the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to come in through Turkey in the north when our forces were coming up from the south out of Kuwait, I believe that a considerably smaller number of the Baathists and the regime elements would have escaped. More would have been capture of killed, and as a result, the insurgency would

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<sup>160</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: All Turks Together," *The Economist*.

<sup>161</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 156.



have been at a lesser intensity than it is today.<sup>162</sup> Relations further deteriorated between Washington in Ankara in July 2003, when U.S. Special forces detained 11 members of the Turkish Special Forces on suspicion that they were planning an assassination mission against a Kurdish politician. The detained Turks were held for 48 hours, and were hooded and mistreated by the Americans. This caused a wave of nationalist anger, humiliation and resentment across Turkey.<sup>163</sup> As a result, Turkish-U.S. relations hit an all time low. Also, Turkish public opinion of America has since dropped dramatically. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, in 2000, 52% of Turks thought highly of America (about the same percentage as in Spain). By 2007, mainly due to the Iraq War, less than 10% held a favorable view of the U.S. In addition to the Iraq issue, another source of tension between Ankara and Washington has been U.S. policy towards Iran.

In the recent years while Turkey has strengthened its relations with Iran and taken a diplomatic route in dealing with its nuclear issue, the U.S. policy towards Iran has become increasingly more confrontational as it has pushed for further sanctions against the Islamic Republic. As a result, Turkey has found itself in disagreement with Washington's aggressive strategy towards Tehran. This divergence became fully evident in June 2010, when Turkey, as a member of the UN Security Council in 2009-2010, voted against the fourth round of sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.<sup>164</sup> This response was the source of much controversy in the international community, especially among

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<sup>162</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 18.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>164</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, "U.N. Approves New Sanctions to Deter Iran," *The New York Times*, June 9 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/middleeast/10sanctions.html>.

U.S. policy-makers who had been quite confident that Turkey would vote in line with U.S. policy. Turkish diplomats explained that Turkey's vote against tougher sanctions on Iran is not because the AKP government is supportive of a nuclear Iran, but because it believes that sanctions are not the right solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. In a recent speech at Columbia University, President Gul was asked to comment on Turkey's negative vote. He responded by first reiterating Turkey's strong stance against nuclear weapons and stating that Turkey believes that the best way to deal with this issue is through diplomacy and not confrontation.<sup>165</sup> Turkey believes that sanctions on Iran will cause more tension between the two nations and lead to greater pressure for war and further destabilization of the region.

Given that Turkey is Iran's neighbor, it is very reasonable for the government to feel particularly concerned about the impact of sanctions. In addition to Turkey's stability concerns, another main reason why Turkey is reluctant to fully support U.S. policy toward Iran is because it would complicate its access to Iranian energy supplies.<sup>166</sup> Turkey is highly dependent on Iran for its energy needs. In 2009, for example, Iran supplied 1/3 of Turkey's total natural gas consumption.<sup>167</sup> If Turkey were to fully support U.S. sanctions on Iran, it would have to pay a high economic price. Turkey learned the lesson that sanctions are bad for business in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, when it

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<sup>165</sup> Abdullah Gul, "What Next? Turkey's Global Vision for a Prosperous Future," Address, Columbia University World Leaders Forum. Sept 24 2010, <http://www.worldleaders.columbia.edu/events/president-turkey-abdullah-g%C3%BCII>.

<sup>166</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 160.

<sup>167</sup> Jamal Dajani, "Why Turkey Is Looking East," *Opinion on The Huffington Post*, June 11 2010, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamal-dajani/why-turkey-is-looking-eas\\_b\\_608852.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamal-dajani/why-turkey-is-looking-eas_b_608852.html).

cut off the flow of oil from Iraq in 1991 in support of U.S. sanctions against Iraq and lost billions of dollars. Turkey is not about to make the same mistake twice, which is why it avoids supporting sanctions on Iran especially ones that target Iran's oil and gas industry.

Despite the recent political tensions between Ankara and Washington, the two countries have enhanced their economic ties. According to data obtained from the World Bank, in 2009, bilateral trade between the two amounted to more than \$11.8 billion. Due to this significantly large trade volume in 2009, the United States was ranked as Turkey's 4<sup>th</sup> biggest trade partner.<sup>168</sup> In 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan and President Obama met in Washington, where they launched the Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation, a new initiative aimed at strengthening trade and investment ties. Since then, several meetings have been held on this agreement and the two countries have enhanced their economic and commercial relations.<sup>169</sup> Turkey's impressive economic growth in the past decade has made its economy much more attractive to America, which feels that Turkey is now a globally important economic actor. In 2009, Turkey attracted \$318 million in FDI from the United States, which was its 4<sup>th</sup> largest FDI inflow.<sup>170</sup> As well stated in a joint-statement after a meeting on the U.S. - Turkey Framework for Strategic Economic and Commercial Cooperation:

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<sup>168</sup> Source: IMF.

<sup>169</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Background Notes: Turkey*, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, November 19, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3432.htm>.

<sup>170</sup> Turkey, *FDI in Turkey*, <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/investmentguide/investorguide/pages/FDIinTurkey.aspx>.

“The United States and Turkey each have a strong incentive to pursue an intensified bilateral economic relationship. Turkey is a fast-rising economic actor in its region and in the world and many of its firms would like to explore new opportunities in the U.S. market. American companies in turn see vast commercial potential in a rapidly developing Turkey of 73 million people, with onward connections to markets in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and beyond.”<sup>171</sup>

Although Turkey-U.S. relations have had their ups and downs, the two nations are still strong strategic partners, both politically and economically. In the eyes of Americans, Turkey used to be solely known for its military contribution to NATO. That is no longer the case however. Now Turkey is becoming increasingly known for its independent foreign policy, dynamic economy and its regional influence.

### **Turkey and Israel**

Not only was Turkey among the first countries to recognize the state of Israel in 1949, but it was also the first Muslim nation to do so.<sup>172</sup> Compared to its Middle Eastern neighbors, for much of its history, Turkey was known to be Israel’s closest ally in the region. However, in the past few years as Turkey-Israeli relations have plummeted, Turkey is no longer considered a close Israeli partner. Relations have deteriorated due to the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008 and also the recent Gaza Flotilla raid. In order to understand current Turkey-Israeli relations it is important to examine what initially united the two nations.

Turkey’s initial good relations with Israel can best be understood when the military factor and the Cold War context are taken into consideration. During the Cold

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<sup>171</sup> United States, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, *Joint Statement on the U.S. - Turkey Framework*, October 2010, <http://www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/press-releases/2010/october/joint-statement-us-turkey-framework-strategic-econ>.

<sup>172</sup> Hasan Kosebalaban, “The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations: What is its Strategic Significance?” *Middle East Policy*, 17:3, (2010), 36.

War, Turkey was determined to consolidate its place in the Western alliance and gave little consideration to its relations with Arab states. Furthermore, Israel was an invisible member of NATO and an important ally of the U.S. Thus, Turkey was not reluctant to recognize Israel in order to further align its policy with that of the United States.<sup>173</sup> The Turkish military at the time also pushed for closer ties with Israel. The Kemalist military elite saw Israel as the perfect 'anti-Islamic' symbol and knew that its alliance with Israel would set Turkey apart from other Muslim countries.<sup>174</sup> For Israel, a good relationship with Turkey was important because it meant having a strong military ally in a rather hostile neighborhood. The military alliance between the two nations was in fact the driving force in Turkey's growing ties with Israel especially in the 1990s when relations among the two states peaked.

In 1996, Turkey and Israel signed a military cooperation agreement as they began joint military training programs. Turkey allowed Israel to establish posts on its soil in order to spy on Iran, Iraq, and Syria. It also allowed Israel to train its pilots over Turkish airspace. Israel in return supplied the Turkish Republic with military technology, including American tanks and warplanes, which the U.S. and EU refused to provide Turkey with. In the 1990s, Israel's military relations were particularly useful to Turkey because it helped Turkey gain leverage in its problematic relations with Syria at the time. The Israeli connection proved particularly valuable when Turkey launched a new military modernization project and received tremendous investment from Israel. In

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<sup>173</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 116.

support of this project, Israel provided Turkey with technology and serious financial investment. Between 2000 and 2004, Israel sold more than \$1 billion worth of arms to Turkey.<sup>175</sup> In addition to the military alliance, the two countries also cooperated economically. Turkey and Israel signed a free trade agreement in 2000 which significantly boosted bilateral trade.<sup>176</sup> According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, between 2000 and 2008 overall trade between Turkey and Israel more than tripled. It amounted to \$3.4 billion in 2008. Despite Turkey and Israel's military and economic cooperation, their relationship was never free of tension.

There has always been sympathy for the plight of Palestinians in Turkey and as a result of this, Turkey-Israeli relations have fluctuated frequently. Their relationship was first tested during 1967 Arab-Israeli War in which Turkey sided with Egypt and refused to join the group that demanded the reopening of the Gulf Aqaba to Israel. During the 1973 War, Ankara once again went against Israeli interests and denied the U.S. access to the American bases in Turkey for the resupply of Israel.<sup>177</sup> Also, in 1980, when Israel declared Jerusalem as its capital, Turkey protested its declaration and withdrew its consulate.<sup>178</sup> Although there had always been underlying tension between Israel and Turkey, relations were relatively stable. It was not until 2008, that Turkey-Israel relations plummeted. Since Soon 2008, two major events: the War on Gaza, also known as

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>176</sup> Benjamin Harvey, "Turkey Alliance With Israel May Rupture on Gaza Raid," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 1, 2010, <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-06-01/turkey-alliance-with-israel-may-rupture-on-gaza-raid-update3-.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 8.

<sup>178</sup> Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations," 36.

Operation Cast Lead, and the Israeli raid on the Gaza-bound Turkish flotilla, caused a significant rift between Turkey and Israel.

In December 2008, Turkey launched Operation Cast Lead, and began a three week bombing campaign against Gaza. The war resulted in the death of more than 1300 Palestinians and worsened the humanitarian crisis in Gaza triggering much opposition from Turkey. Operation Cast Lead proved to be a turning point in Israel-Turkish relations. Prime Minister Erdoğan's abrupt walk-out from the Davos Summit after a heated debate over the War in Gaza was an important representation of Turkish reaction. During this Summit in January 2009, Erdoğan clashed with the Israeli President Shimon Peres, as he condemned Israeli actions against Gaza. Before storming off, Erdoğan directly called out the Israeli President and told him to stop killing innocent children.<sup>179</sup> This revealed how passionately Erdoğan felt for the Palestinians and their sufferings. Also, Erdoğan's reaction was a reflection of the views of the Turkish population, who were angry and shocked by the Israeli's assault on the Palestinian people. After the attack on Gaza began there were massive protests and demonstrations throughout Turkey condemning Israeli actions. Erdoğan himself was personally caught by surprise and felt betrayed by Israel because just days before the War, Ehud Olmert had visited Turkey and promised a positive response on talks with Syria. Turkey had been facilitating talks between Israel and Syria since 2004 and Erdoğan was convinced that he was making serious progress on brokering peace between the two hostile nations. Erdoğan who felt that Olmert had made a personal commitment to upholding peace talks was very angry

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

and disappointed in how quickly Israel put an end to years of efforts made in brokering Arab-Israeli peace.<sup>180</sup> Erdoğan's perception of having been betrayed by his Israeli partner in addition to the overall aggression of Israel against Palestinians severely impacted Turkey's relations with Israel.

The most serious negative development in Turkish-Israeli relations was the June 2010 Israeli attack against an aid flotilla attempting to break the blockade that Israel had imposed on Gaza. Israeli soldiers stormed the Turkish ship on international waters, attacking the people on board, injuring hundreds and killing nine. The flotilla was carrying 700 pro-Palestinian activists and 10,000 tons of aid. Among those on board were 400 Turks who were determined to put an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.<sup>181</sup> Although Israel justified its actions as normal self-defense, Turkey referred to Israeli actions as 'state terrorism' and considered it an act of 'piracy' and 'murder by a state.'<sup>182</sup> Turkey was not alone in its reaction and condemnation of Israeli actions against the Gaza-bound aid ship. The deadly raid sparked an international outcry and led to mass demonstrations throughout the world. In Istanbul more than 10,000 protested around the Israeli consulate shouting in anger and waving signs saying 'Killer Israel.'<sup>183</sup>

In its reaction towards the flotilla attack, the AKP government withdrew its ambassador to Israel and canceled three military exercises that were planned for 2010.

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>181</sup> "Turks March against Israeli Attack," *Aljazeera*, May 31 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2010/05/201053116143622331.html>.

<sup>182</sup> Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations," 36.

<sup>183</sup> "Turks March against Israeli Attack," *Aljazeera*.



Furthermore, the government sought international condemnation of Israel through the UN Security Council, NATO, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This increased the pressure on Israel and led to the UN investigation of the incident. Also, Ankara demanded the lifting of the blockade and an apology from Israel in addition to compensation for the families of the victims.<sup>184</sup> The Gaza flotilla attack has caused Turkey-Israeli relations to hit an all time low. As Israel continues to plead self-defense and refuses an apology, Turkey is growing more frustrated and is continuously calling on international action against Israel. Unless Israel tries to normalize its relations with Turkey and meets the demands of the AKP government, their relationship is not likely to improve. There is now deep distrust between Turkey and Israel.

In the past several years AKP leaders tried harder than any other previous government in pushing peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians as well as between Israel and Syria. Also, the Gaza flotilla attack made Turkey more involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict and strengthened its pro-Palestinian stance. With eight Turks dead as a result of Israel's violent raid, Turkey now felt even stronger about the human rights violations committed by the Israeli government. Had Israel not killed nine people on board, Turkey-Israeli relations would not have plummeted to this extent. In a sense, Israeli actions pushed Turkey to take a harder stance on the issue. It is important to highlight that Turkey is not the only country that condemns Israel for its recent human rights violations; there are several European countries that agree with Turkey's stance on Israel. They might not express their pro-Palestinians views as strongly and vocally as

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<sup>184</sup> Kosebalaban, "The Crisis in Turkish-Israeli Relations," 46.

Turkey, but they have voiced their opinion by voting in favor of several UN Human Rights Council resolutions against the Israeli government. Also, as mentioned in *The Economist*: “the Turkish government is doing what democracies tend to do: reflecting its people’s views.”<sup>185</sup> Turks along with other Muslims have always sympathized with the Palestinian cause and highly criticized Israel’s appalling treatment of Palestinians. Long before tensions arose between Turkey and Israel, polls revealed that Turks have always favored the Palestinians over Israel. According to a poll taken in 2004, approximately two-thirds of Turks favored Turkey siding with the Palestinians while less than 3% thought Turkey should side with Israel.<sup>186</sup> Also, according to the German Marshall Fund of the U.S., in 2007, more than 47% of Turks held a favorable view of Palestinians, the highest percentage compared to any other national group; only 5% thought well of Israel.<sup>187</sup> Under the AKP government, Ankara’s foreign policy is now more receptive to public opinion.

In addition to the negative public opinion in Turkey, the tense situation between the two countries has hurt economic ties as well, particularly trade and tourism. Economic and civilian relations have plummeted since 2008 and especially after that Gaza flotilla attack. According to data obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute, from 2008 to 2009, overall trade between Turkey and Israel dropped by nearly 30%, decreasing from \$3.4 billion to \$2.6 billion. The tension between the two countries has

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<sup>185</sup> “A Country's Welcome Rise: Is Turkey Turning Its Back on the West?” *The Economist*, October 21, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17309065>.

<sup>186</sup> Soner Cagaptay, “Where Goes the U.S.-Turkish Relationship?” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2004. <http://www.cagaptay.com/639/where-goes-the-us-turkish-relationship>.

<sup>187</sup> Fuller, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 117.

also been reflected in tourism. Turkey used to be the second most popular tourism destination for Israelis, and it was highly promoted in the Israeli media as well. In 2008, 558,183 Israeli citizens visited Turkey. This high number dropped by 44% and decreased to 311,582 in 2009. The number of Israeli tourists is expected to decrease much further after the 2010 Gaza flotilla crisis due to the fact that the Israeli Foreign Minister has warned Israeli citizens to avoid travel to Turkey and encouraged them to boycott the country. Consequently, in 2010, more than 130,000 Israeli tourists cancelled their trip to Turkey.<sup>188</sup> Thus, in addition to military and diplomatic ties being broken, economic and civilian ties have also suffered.

Since Operation Cast Lead and the Israeli raid on the Turkish Freedom Flotilla, Israeli and Turkish relations have significantly deteriorated. It takes years to establish good relations and minutes to break them. In the aftermath of the Israeli military raid on the flotilla, Abdullah Gul announced in a televised speech: "from now on, Turkish-Israeli ties will never be the same. This incident has left an irreparable and deep scar."<sup>189</sup> Despite the immense tension on both sides, it is unlikely that the Turkish government will completely freeze all ties with Israel, because the costs of doing so would be very high. At a time when Western diplomats and policy makers doubt Turkey's Western credential and commitments, AKP leaders are likely to avoid completely cutting ties with Israel. However, at the same time, it is highly unlikely that relations will improve in the near

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<sup>188</sup> Hasan Kanbolat, "A Look at Turkish-Israeli Economic Relations after the Crisis," *Zaman*, June 3 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnists-211951-a-look-at-turkish-israeli-economic-relations-after-the-crisis.html>.

<sup>189</sup> "Turkey Will 'never Forgive' Israel." *Al Jazeera*. June 4 2010, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2010/06/20106312530449379.html>.

future. In addition to the increasingly hostility towards Turkey, there is also a diminished need for an Israeli alliance in Ankara. Now that Turkey has excellent relations with the Muslim world and particularly with Syria, a military alliance with Israel is no longer a valuable asset. The days when Turkey looked towards Israel for alliance against the Arab world are over.

## CHAPTER 4- Turkey's Relations with the East

### Turkey's New Foreign Policy

The purpose of this chapter is to examine Turkey's new foreign policy objectives under the AKP government and to discuss the underlying reasons for Ankara's new found interest in the greater Middle East. Particular focus will be given to Turkey's relations with Iraq, Iran, and Syria, with whom Turkey shares borders.

Since the end of the Cold War and most recently with the AKP government in power, Turkish foreign policy has undergone a profound and unprecedented transformation. Turkey no longer takes a passive and one-dimensional stance but rather pursues a more dynamic and multi-dimensional foreign policy. Furthermore, its international priorities have shifted from hard security concerns to soft power and commercial interests. AKP leaders, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, President Abdullah Gul, and Turkey's new foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, can be credited for Turkey's new regional influence and assertive foreign policy in the Middle East. Ahmet Davutoğlu in particular, has become known as the "architect" and the main driver of Turkey's active and diversified foreign policy under the AKP.<sup>190</sup>

Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed as Turkey's Foreign Minister in 2009, after being the chief foreign policy advisor of Prime Minister Erdoğan for seven years.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Alexander Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42:6 (2006), 946.

<sup>191</sup> Bulent Aras, "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Zaman*, June 30 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-179504-159-davutoglu-era-in-turkish-foreign-policy.html>.

Under Davutoğlu's leadership, Turkey now adheres to the concept of "strategic depth," which includes the pursuit of an active and diversified foreign policy both in the world and in the former Ottoman region. After all, the Ottoman Empire at its height in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a large and powerful empire. It stretched across three continents and encompassed most of the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Eastern Europe, where it extended its culture and influence and left an enduring legacy. Davutoğlu's 'strategic depth' doctrine calls for a new policy of engagement with the region. Davutoğlu believes that Turkey should take advantage of the legacy of the Ottoman Empire and use its geographical and historical depth to assert its power and interest in the world.<sup>192</sup> He argues that Turkey has neglected its regional interests, particularly in the Middle East, due to its unbalanced foreign policy and overemphasis on ties with the West. Furthermore, Davutoğlu has based Turkey's foreign policy on the principle of 'zero problems with the neighbors,' and has made the effort to put an end to past hostilities among Turkey and its neighbors.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, he has incorporated a new diplomatic style in Turkish foreign policy, which has resulted in the spread of Turkish soft power-political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence- in the former Ottoman region. In the past decade, due to the adoption of a new engagement policy, Turkish foreign policy has become truly multifaceted. Turkey no longer ignores its backyard and has made the deliberate effort to improve its economic and political ties with its Middle Eastern neighbors.

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<sup>192</sup> Murinson, "The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy," 948.

<sup>193</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: The Davutoğlu Effect" *The Economist*, October 23, 2010.

## Turkey and Iraq

After losing World War I, the British gained control of what is now contemporary Iraq, which used to be part of the Ottoman Empire. In the British mandate of Iraq, Mosul and Kirkuk, the two former Ottoman provinces with the highest population of Kurds, were also included. Although initially Ataturk demanded the return of these provinces, however, once confronted with the difficulty of assimilating the Kurds in the Turkish eastern region, he abandoned the idea. Ataturk and the other Kemalist founding fathers however remained suspicious of Western imperialist ambitions to carve up a Kurdish state (which would include Turkey's eastern region) and break up the new Republic.<sup>194</sup> With no natural borders between the Kurdish region of Iraq and Turkey, this suspicion grew. In 1926, after eight years of intense pressure from Ankara, the Brits finally drew up a border, and Ataturk gave up his claim on the Kurdish provinces.<sup>195</sup> With the borders finally drawn, Ataturk channeled his attention towards his domestic Westernization efforts and “eschewed any foreign policy adventures with irredentist or Ottomanist undertones.”<sup>196</sup>

One of the few times that Ankara did involve itself in regional efforts was in the late 1930s. In 1937, Turkey signed the Saadabad Pact with Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. The Saadabad Pact was a non-aggression pact where the four countries agreed to recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and to cooperate on suppressing

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<sup>194</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 6.

<sup>195</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 97.

<sup>196</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 6.

rebellious movements and ethnic demands within their borders. Although the Kurds were not specifically mentioned, it was indirectly implied. In fact, the Kurdish issue was the main reason why Ankara signed the pact. With the end of World War I, the Kurds who previously lived within the boundaries of the former Ottoman Empire were divided between Turkey and the new British and French mandates of Iraq and Syria. Iran also had a large Kurdish population. Thus for Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, the Kurdish issue played a major role in the creation of the pact, because for them it meant the containment of Kurdish insurgencies and the crushing of the Kurdish demand for autonomy.<sup>197</sup>

The early Cold War period, once again brought Turkey and Iraq together as the two nations signed a second pact known as the Baghdad Pact . However, this time the alliance was short-lived. The Baghdad Pact, signed in 1955, as afore mentioned, was aimed at containing the growth of Soviet influence in the region. This pact placed both Turkey and Iraq in the Western camp and strengthened their cooperation. This mutual cooperation however came to an abrupt end in 1958, after the British-sponsored monarchy in Iraq was overthrown. The new leadership that came to power in Iraq promptly withdrew from the pro-Western pact and instead joined the Arab nationalist camp that largely looked towards the Soviet Union for support.<sup>198</sup> Tensions between Iraq and Turkey arose shortly thereafter. In reaction to Iraq's foreign policy shift, Turkey even proposed a Western military intervention in Iraq, which other members of the pact and

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<sup>197</sup> Mustafa Kibaroglu, Aysegul Kibaroglu, *Global Security Watch--Turkey: A Reference Handbook*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), 34.

<sup>198</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 34.



the United States strongly disagreed with.<sup>199</sup> Iraq's abandonment of the pact further fueled Turkish hostility towards the Arab world and caused a rift between the two nations. For the next several decades, Turkey-Iraq relations remained tense and limited, as Turkey ignored Iraq along with other Arab nations in the region.

The oil crises of 1970s however, caused Turkey to reach out to Iraq.<sup>200</sup> In order to assure its oil supply, Turkey pushed for stronger economic relations with Iraq. The countries soon began to establish the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline which opened up in 1977. This pipeline carried approximately a quarter of Iraqi crude oil exports into Turkey.<sup>201</sup> Turkey maintained its relatively cordial ties with Iraq until the late 1980s. In 1991 however, with the breakout of the Gulf War, Turkey, in support of U.S. policy and in line with its Western orientation, broke off all ties with Iraq. The 1991, Gulf War was a watershed event in Turkey-Iraq relations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ankara cut off all ties with Baghdad. It enforced UN sanctions which called for the closing of the 1977 Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline and deployed thousands of troops on its shared border with Iraq. The aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War was a disaster for Turkey. Not only did Turkey lose one of its top economic partners along with billions of dollars, it also now faced a serious security problem.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the Kurdish issue became an important security threat for Ankara. The War caused thousands of Kurdish refugees to flee into Turkey at a time

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<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>200</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 9.

<sup>201</sup> "Turkey, Iraq to Sign Pipeline Accord after Delay," *Reuters*, September 3, 2010, <http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFLDE68C01220100913>.

when Turkey was battling against its own Kurdish population at home. From early 1980s onward, there was an ongoing armed conflict between Turkey and various Kurdish insurgent groups such as the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which called for the creation of an independent Kurdish nation. Now that thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees had flooded in to Turkey and the Kurdish question was gaining international attention, Turkey grew insecure as its old fear of the possible break of the Republic resurfaced. What further fueled this fear was the fact that the Iraqi Kurdish region in northern Iraq was now under U.S. and UN protection and was quickly developing into an autonomous Kurdish zone. By the mid-1990s it was very much an independent de facto state, in all but name.<sup>202</sup> Also, another factor added to Turkey's insecurity. Iraqi Kurdish insurgent groups gained strength and the PKK found a logistical base in northern Iraq.<sup>203</sup> Consequently, in the years that followed the Kurdish issue dominated Turkey's foreign policy towards the region. Starting in the mid-1990s, Turkey launched dozens of operations in northern Iraq with the aim of destroying PKK sanctuaries. These operations did gradually lead to the containment of the PKK military threat and somewhat eased Turkey's Kurdish fear.<sup>204</sup> Also, at the time Ankara knew that it could count on Saddam Hussein to silence Kurdish demands and maintain stability in the region.<sup>205</sup> Turkey's sense of stability in the Kurdish region was short lived however. In March 2003, despite

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<sup>202</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic* 99.

<sup>203</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 11.

<sup>204</sup> Larrabee and Lesser, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, 137.

<sup>205</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 17.

strong opposition from Ankara, the United States invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam's regime.

As Iraq slipped into chaos after the U.S. invasion, Turkey's fear of Kurdish separatism reemerged and northern Iraq once again topped Turkey's security agenda.<sup>206</sup> Also, the PKK, which Turkey had believed was successfully dissolved, resurfaced and took up arms again. Since 2005, the PKK has repeatedly launched attacks on Turkish territory and has killed hundreds of Turkish troops. These attacks were once again organized and launched from sanctuaries in northern Iraq.<sup>207</sup> The threats that Turkey had fought off for decades had now reemerged and seemed stronger than ever. In addition to Iraq becoming a breeding ground for terrorism and ethnic separatism, Kurdish autonomy was also gaining serious momentum in Iraq. The reemergence of the PKK coupled with the reality of Kurdish autonomy, compelled Ankara to get involved. The AKP government had two ways in which it could respond to the situation in Iraq: it could either stick to the traditional Kemalist approach of refusing dialogue with Kurds, or it could pursue a more flexible and pragmatic approach. The AKP leaders chose the latter.<sup>208</sup> It is possible that if the Kemalist leaders were in power, Turkey would have launched a military intervention in northern Iraq against the rising Kurdish threat. The AKP government however, has distanced itself from the confrontational approach and has relied on dialogue instead. In 2007, Abdullah Gul, who was then the Foreign Minister of Turkey, initiated dialogue with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and invited its

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<sup>206</sup> Kibaroglu, *Global Security Watch*, 119.

<sup>207</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 18.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Prime Minister to visit Ankara. However, he was soon forced to cancel the event after the chief of the Turkish general staff publically announced his opposition to dialogue with the Iraqi Kurdish leader.<sup>209</sup> Despite opposition from military and secular elite, AKP leaders gradually began to establish diplomatic relations with the Kurdish government in northern Iraq.

In 2007, with help from Washington, dialogue officially began with Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).<sup>210</sup> Since then, bilateral relations between Turkey and northern Iraq have reached unprecedented heights. Turkey now has four diplomatic posts in Iraq, one of which is located in Erbil, the KRG capital. Also, the KRG just recently agreed to assist Turkey in curtailing the PKK.<sup>211</sup> In line with its new “zero-problem with neighbors” foreign policy and new independent role, AKP leaders have taken a diplomatic approach in dealing with the historical Kurdish issue. In addition to the Kurdish nationalism and separatism issue, there are also other important factors such as economic interest and the new geopolitical environment that have that have contributed to Turkey’s growing ties with not just northern Iraq but the country as a whole.

Growing economic relations between Turkey and Iraq have significantly strengthened their new relationship. The fall of Saddam’s regime gave Ankara the opportunity to reestablish the economic ties that had previously existed between Turkey

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, April 2010, 4.

<sup>211</sup> Henri J Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq: Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan," Carnegie Middle East Center, May 2010, <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=40773>.

and Iraq prior to the 1991 Gulf War. The AKP, as part of its growing economic interest in the region, seized this opportunity and began to establish trade and business relations with Iraq. Since 2003, trade relations between Turkey and Iraq have reached a record high. In 2009, total trade between the two countries amounted to more than \$6 billion, almost six times the amount it was in 2003.<sup>212</sup> In addition to trade relations, Turkey has also increased investment in Iraq, especially in the Kurdish region. Currently more than 700 Turkish companies are investing in Iraq. These Turkish firms have carried out dozens of construction projects. They have built houses, bridges, highways, railroads, and schools throughout Iraq.<sup>213</sup> Turkish companies have also built most of the modern symbols representing northern Iraq's Kurdish identity, such as TV networks, universities and international airports. A Turkish company has even built a 'presidential palace' in Erbil for the Kurdish government.<sup>214</sup> These growing business relations between Turkey and Iraq have eased historical tensions among the two countries. Both sides have found their new friendship economically beneficial. Iraq's economy is benefiting from Turkey's trade, investment and infrastructure projects, and Turkey is benefiting from both Iraqi trade and also access to oil. It has been able to diversify its energy needs by directly importing oil from northern Iraq.<sup>215</sup> While meeting its economic interests Turkey has also been able to increase its influence in the region.

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<sup>212</sup> Data obtained from Turkish Statistical Institute.

<sup>213</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Resurgent Turkey Flexes Its Muscles around Iraq," *The New York Times*, January 4, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/05/world/middleeast/05turkey.html>.

<sup>214</sup> Bhadrakumar, M. K. "Iraqi Kurds Play with Turkish Fire." *Asia Times Online*. April 14, 2007, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/ID14Ak03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ID14Ak03.html).

<sup>215</sup> Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq," 6.

By asserting its economic power in Iraq, Turkey has successfully boosted its stature as an influential regional actor. Unlike the United States which focused on the number of troops it would send to Iraq, Turkey focused instead on the number of infrastructure projects it would initiate. Turkey's efforts in Iraq are considered to have a more lasting legacy because of the AKP's focus on soft power: the assertion of influence through diplomacy and economic reconstruction and development.<sup>216</sup> Also, the United States' policy failure and its overall conduct and inability to stabilize Iraq, created a vacuum of leadership in the region. This vacuum in fact gave Turkey the perfect opportunity to step in and exert its power and pursue its interests in northern Iraq.<sup>217</sup> Turkey's new approach towards Kurdish Iraq has been received well by Kurdish officials. Turkey's acceptance of KRG and its dedication to economic development in Iraq, especially in the northern region, has helped Turkey project a positive image to the Iraqi Kurds, who no longer feel threatened by Ankara.<sup>218</sup>

### **Turkey and Iran**

Turkey and Iran have always been historical rivals. In the past much of the rivalry and tension between them was driven by ideological and religious differences. During the Ottoman Period, there was a clear Sunni-Shia rift between the two empires. It was always the Sunni Ottomans versus the Shia Persians. After assuming the title of caliphate, the Ottoman Sultans saw the Shia Persians as heretics who tried to invade Sunni land.

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<sup>216</sup> Shadid, "Resurgent Turkey Flexes Its Muscles around Iraq."

<sup>217</sup> Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq," 7.

<sup>218</sup> Shadid, "Resurgent Turkey Flexes Its Muscles around Iraq."

Ottomans and Persians also fought major wars during the sixteenth century.<sup>219</sup> By the seventeenth century however, serious territorial wars between them had come to an end, and despite their inherent religious differences they managed to coexist in virtual peace for hundreds of years. The Turks and Persians did not become actual allies until after World War I however. Relations began to improve between Turkey and Iran during the Ataturk period and the Pahlavi era in Iran. Ataturk's secular Western model was admired by Reza Shah of Iran who was also a staunch secularist and a Western modernizer. Although Reza Shah was not nearly as successful, he also imposed westernization reforms similar to that of Ataturk's in Iran. In addition to admiration for Turkey's secular and Western model, what brought the two countries closer was the Cold War.

Turkey and Iran shared a geopolitical concern over the rise of the Soviet threat and both aligned themselves to the Western camp.<sup>220</sup> However, this alliance came to an abrupt end in 1979 with the Iranian revolution which transformed the country into an Islamic Republic. In the 1980s, the historic rivalry between Turkey and Iran reemerged. This time it was in the context of a secular Turkey versus Shia Iran. When Ayatollah Khomeini began talks of exporting the Islamic revolution, the Kemalists came to see their secular political regime as a natural target. Thus, Turkey started to distance itself from Iran and began to pursue the same non-engagement policy it had towards other Muslim countries in the region.<sup>221</sup> The strictly Islamic character of the Iranian government however was not the only source of tension among them. The other issue that rose

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<sup>219</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 21.

<sup>220</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 107.

<sup>221</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 21.

between Turkey and Iran had to do with the Kurdish issue and the PKK. As Turkey became the target of PKK attacks in the mid-1980s, the military began to accuse Iran of supporting insurgents and allowing them to use Iranian territory to launch attacks on Turkey. Iran, on the other hand, accused Turkey of supporting and harboring anti-revolutionary forces.<sup>222</sup> By the mid-1990s, as Iran's Islamic revolution lost steam, relations between Turkey and Iran gradually improved. Also, by the 1990s, political Islam was on the rise in Turkey which helped bring Tehran and Ankara closer together. Erbakan, who was Prime Minister in 1996, visited Tehran and made the effort to enhance economic and political ties with Iran.<sup>223</sup> Although he was overthrown in the 1997 military coup, he normalized Ankara's relations with Iran. Once the AKP government came to power, it was able to build on this relationship and strengthen Turkish-Iranian relations. Today, Turkey and Iran are close allies with strong diplomatic, economic and political ties. They have just recently cooperated in joint military efforts against the PKK and the PJAK (Party for a Free Life), a similar Kurdish organization operating in Iran.<sup>224</sup> It is important however, to distinguish between Erbakan's intentions and AKP's foreign policy vision. Erbakan's engagement with Iran was driven by his desire to pursue pan-Islamic ideas in the region. AKP leaders however, are not interested in pan-Islamism. Their aim is for Turkey to have good relations with all its neighbors so that it can become an important regional actor.

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<sup>222</sup> Kibaroglu, *Global Security Watch*, 153,

<sup>223</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 22.

<sup>224</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 111.



The AKP leaders adhered to their diplomatic and proactive policy of engagement and put historical differences aside as they improved Ankara's relations with Tehran. Starting with Prime Minister Erdoğan's two day visit to Tehran in July 2004, there has been a thawing of relations between the two neighbors.<sup>225</sup> Since the AKP government came to power, Turkey has deepened its relationship with Iran through growing trade and bilateral investment. According to data obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute, since 2002, trade between Turkey and Iran has increased more than four-fold, reaching \$5.4 billion in 2009. Also just recently, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that Ankara is seeking to triple trade volumes with Iran between 2010 and 2015. In a speech to business leaders in Istanbul who are the main investors in Iran's state-owned machinery, automotive and textile industries, Erdoğan ensured them that economic ties between Ankara and Tehran will continue to grow and that the two countries are near signing a 'preferential trade agreement' that could add billions of more dollars to Turkey's growing economy.<sup>226</sup> Iran has become an attractive export market for Turkish businessmen and the Anatolian Tigers. In 2010, Iran became the 12<sup>th</sup> biggest importer of Turkish goods, climbing up from being 17<sup>th</sup> in 2005. While most Turkish exports are from the automotive and machinery sectors, Iran's exports to Turkey are largely from one sector:

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<sup>225</sup> K. Gajendra Singh, "Turkey and Iran Coming Closer." South Asian Analysis Group, March 8, 2004, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers11%5Cpaper1077.html>.

<sup>226</sup> Joe Parkinson, "Turkey Aims to Triple Iran Trade, Despite International Sanctions," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 2010, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703440604575496031866586468.html>.

energy.<sup>227</sup> Energy has become a major force behind the warming of relations between Iran and Turkey.

As previously mentioned, Turkey is highly dependent on Iran for energy. Iran is its second largest supplier of natural gas. Thus, cooperation in the energy sector is a key priority for the Turkish Republic. As Turkey's energy needs have increased, Iran has actively sought new markets for its most important export, providing further means of cooperation among them.<sup>228</sup> The two have also engaged in discussion regarding the construction of new pipelines that would deliver Iranian oil via Turkey to Europe. In February 2007, Erdoğan signed two new energy deals with Iran: one granting the Turkish Petroleum Corporation permission to explore oil and gas fields in Iran, and another allowing the construction of pipeline that passes through Iran and allows the transfer of gas from Turkmenistan to Turkey and on to Europe.<sup>229</sup> Despite continuous economic sanctions by the U.S. and the UN to stop global investment in Iran's energy sector, Turkey has made it clear that it will not allow sanctions to impair its energy cooperation with Iran. Many of Erdoğan's critics view Turkey's energy deals with Iran as proof that he is ultimately trying to steer Turkey away from the West. However, AKP leaders argue that they in fact have the opposite goal: to increase Turkey's chances of becoming an EU member by making it a vital energy corridor for the flow of oil and gas between the

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<sup>227</sup> "Factbox: Turkey's Relations with Iran," *Reuters*, June 9, 2010, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/06/09/uk-nuclear-iran-turkey-factbox-idUKTRE65860720100609>.

<sup>228</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 112.

<sup>229</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 23.

Middle East and Europe.<sup>230</sup> This argument certainly has validity given the fact that unlike the United States, the European Union has been in favor of Turkish pipeline plans.<sup>231</sup> This is because the European Union imports half of its energy and is in serious need of diversifying its sources. Around a fifth of EU countries' oil and gas comes from Russia's large Gazprom Company which has a monopoly-like control over EU energy.<sup>232</sup> Turkey through its strong economic ties with Iran has the potential to undermine Russia's energy dominance and help both the European Union and its own nation reduce their strong dependency on Russia.

If Turkey succeeds in bringing Iranian oil and natural gas to Europe, it will further increase its regional importance, which has been one of its main foreign policy objectives. Ahmet Davutoğlu, believes that by remaining actively involved in the region and maintaining good relations with Middle Eastern countries like Iran, Turkey is becoming more, not less, attractive to Europe and the West.<sup>233</sup> AKP leaders also point out that no other nation that is a member of the Western alliance has regular access to high-level Iranian officials, like Turkey does.<sup>234</sup> This high-profile relationship with Iran has rightly increased Turkey's sense of self-importance because it has given Turkey significant bargaining power. Turkey in fact has tried to broker compromise between its Western allies and Iran. Just this past month, in January 2011, Turkey facilitated nuclear

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<sup>230</sup> "Turkey and Iran: Too Energetic a Friendship," *The Economist*. August 23, 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/9687845>.

<sup>231</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 112.

<sup>232</sup> "Turkey and Iran: Too Energetic a Friendship," *The Economist*.

<sup>233</sup> "A Special Report on Turkey: The Davutoğlu Effect," *The Economist*.

<sup>234</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 17.

talks between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany.<sup>235</sup> The fact that Turkey was the host alone demonstrates that Turkey has successfully established itself as an important and valuable partner both in the eyes of the West and Iran.

Turkey has chosen a different approach towards Iran, one that contrasts markedly with U.S. policy. Turkey, similar to its Western partners is against Iran's development of nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear capability is a serious security concern for Turkey, not because it fears an attack from Iran, but rather because a nuclear Iran would gravely threaten stability in the region. Turkey, has however, recognized the right of Iran, as a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to develop nuclear technology for peaceful means.<sup>236</sup> According to Namik Tan, the Turkish Ambassador to the United States, the Turkish government believes that engagement is the only path to follow in dealing with Iran's nuclear issue. It is in line with this perspective that Turkey initiated the Joint Declaration with Iran and voted against new sanctions at the UN Security Council.<sup>237</sup> The Joint Declaration signed between Iran, Turkey, and Brazil in May 2010, resumed dialogue between Iran & the international community. By signing the agreement Iran reaffirmed its commitment to the NPT and agreed to send 1,200 kilograms of low-

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<sup>235</sup> Gul Tuysuz, "Turkey Hosts Nuclear Talks for Iran, U.N. Security Council Members, Germany," *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/20/AR2011012002794.html>,

<sup>236</sup> Kibaroglu, *Global Security Watch*, 157.

<sup>237</sup> Namik Tan, "Turkish-US Strategic Partnership," *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 12, 2011, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkish-us-strategic-partnership-2011-01-11>.

enriched uranium to Turkey, where it would then be monitored by the IAEA.<sup>238</sup> The AKP government felt that through its diplomatic efforts it was making progress on the Iranian nuclear issue. In line with this non-confrontational approach, Turkey (and Brazil) opposed the UN resolution which called for tougher sanctions on Iran. If it had voted in favor of the sanctions, Turkey would have completely undermined the deal it had made with Iran in May. Turkey's assertiveness regarding Iran is relatively new and the international community, especially the United States, is not accustomed to seeing Turkey play such an independent role in Middle Eastern affairs.

Although Turkey and the United States share similar concerns regarding Iran, AKP leaders prefer to use soft power. As Mustafa Akyol, a Turkish American journalist states in a recent *Foreign Affairs* article: “[AKP leaders] have learned that they can gain - - both in standing and economically -- by declining to join the United States when it acts in ways that seem needlessly aggressive.”<sup>239</sup> Although Turkey wants to keep its dialogue with Iran going, nuclear diplomacy is very complicated and difficult to maintain. It has already caused tension between the United States and Turkey. It is going to be very challenging for AKP leaders to maintain good relations with both Iran and the United States given the years of hostility between Washington and Tehran. However, Turkey is certainly capable of tackling this challenge especially if it maintains its diplomatic clout. Furthermore, neither Iran nor the United States have any reason to cut their ties with

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<sup>238</sup> "Nuclear Fuel Declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil." *BBC News*, May 17, 2010, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8686728.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8686728.stm).

<sup>239</sup> Mustafa Akyol, "An Unlikely Trio: Can Iran, Turkey, and the United States Become Allies?" *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2010, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66535/mustafa-akyol/an-unlikely-trio?page=2>.

Turkey. The United States still considers Turkey an important ally and is becoming increasingly aware of its strategic importance in the current international environment. Iran also considers Turkey a key partner, because Turkey is one of the few Muslim countries that can help the Islamic Republic break free of the isolation the West has imposed on it.

### **Turkey and Syria**

In the past, there was intense hostility and friction between Turkey and Syria. The two countries came close to war on several occasions.<sup>240</sup> Historical tension between Turkey and Syria were largely due to: territorial disputes, water problems, Cold War rivalry, the PKK, as well as Turkey's close relations with Israel. Syria had very strong anti-Turkish feelings because Turkey, after the French mandate of Syria in 1983, took over the Syrian province of Alexandretta and made it into the Turkish province of Hatay.<sup>241</sup> In addition to the territorial conflict, the fact that the two countries were at opposite poles of the Cold War further fueled tensions. While Turkey was a member of NATO and a strong supporter of the Western alliance, Syria was aligned with the Soviet Union. During this period military threats were very common on both sides. In order to defend themselves, each side sought ways to pressure the other.<sup>242</sup> Turkey for example, began constructing dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which significantly reduced

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<sup>240</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 93.

<sup>241</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 95.

water flows into the dry northern region of Syria.<sup>243</sup> Also, Syria worsened relations between the two in the 1980s by allowing PKK militants to set up training facilities in Lebanon's Bīqā' valley.

In addition to providing state support for the PKK, Syria also let Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's main leader, base himself in Damascus. As the scope of PKK terrorist operations worsened in the 1990s, Turkey's frustration with Damascus exacerbated. At this time Turkey's relations with Israel were excellent, especially in terms of military cooperation.<sup>244</sup> Thus, in response to Damascus' support for the PKK, the Turkish military sought Israeli assistance in order to increase the pressure on Syria.<sup>245</sup> Turkey's alliance with Israel, the ultimate enemy of the Arab world, dramatically increased anti-Turkish feelings in Syria. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was able to put more pressure on Syria, without having to worry about greater Cold War confrontations. In 1998, Turkey gave Syria an ultimatum: immediately cease support for the PKK or face a military invasion. Syria chose the former option and soon expelled Öcalan, paving the way for his capture in Kenya less than a year later. After ousting Öcalan, Turkey-Syrian relations gradually improved as the two countries established diplomatic and economic relations.<sup>246</sup> However, it was not until the AKP government came to power, that relations between the two qualitatively improved.

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<sup>243</sup> Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 3.

<sup>244</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 95.

<sup>245</sup> Nick Danforth, "Turkey: Between Paranoia and Prosperity," *Dissent* 58:1 (2011), 19.

<sup>246</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 96.

Under the AKP government Turkey's relation with Damascus has undergone a dramatic shift. Starting in 2004, a series of high-level visits took place between Turkey and Syria. In 2004, Erdoğan traveled to Syria and signed economic and security agreements.<sup>247</sup> Less than a year later in January 2005, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited Ankara—this was the first time a Syrian President had traveled to Turkey.<sup>248</sup> In addition to a transformed diplomatic relationship, Turkey and Syria improved their economic relations as well. In 2004, Turkish-Syrian bilateral trade reached \$752 million; by 2008 total trade nearly tripled, reaching \$2.06 billion.<sup>249</sup> Between 2005 and 2007, more than 30 Turkish investment projects, valued at over \$150 million, were launched in Syria. Also, in 2006, Turkey and Syria established a free-trade zone and the two countries set up a joint company for oil and natural gas exploration. There has also been a positive change in civilian interactions. Between 2000 and 2005, Turkish tourists to Syria increased nineteen-fold.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, in September 2009, Turkey and Syria agreed to lift visa requirements,<sup>251</sup> which will further increase civilian interaction and boost tourism among the two countries.

An important driving force behind this rapprochement between Syria and Turkey was the Kurdish separatism issue in the post 9/11 environment. Syria which has a Kurdish population of about one million, felt threatened by the Iraq War and the rise of

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<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>248</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 24.

<sup>249</sup> Data obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute.

<sup>250</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 25.

<sup>251</sup> "Turkey, Syria Agree to Lift Visa Requirements," *Hurriyet Daily News*, September 17, 2009, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-syria-agree-to-lift-visa-requirements-2009-09-17>.



Kurdish nationalism. Thus, this common security concern due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq brought the two countries closer together. Also, Syria, like Iran, faces isolation from the West, and seeks to use its ties with Turkey to expand its relations with the international community. The AKP government aims to play an active role in the region, and is more than willing to have Turkey be the bridge between Syria and the West. In fact, in 2007, Turkey initiated and facilitated multiple rounds of indirect talks between Syria and Israel with the aim of improving Israeli-Syrian relations.<sup>252</sup> Although the talks came to a halt after the Israeli War on Gaza in 2009, Turkey's engagement efforts did produce changes. Serious talks were held on the Golan Heights and new borderlines. Also, Syria was able to break out of its isolation.<sup>253</sup> As with Iran and Iraq, AKP leaders once again demonstrated their commitment to diplomacy and proved their ability and desire to play an active role in the region.

### **Turkey and the Arab World**

For many Arabs, the election of a moderate Islamic party in Turkey was a positive sign that shared Islamic and historical heritage could perhaps rekindle relations between them.<sup>254</sup> The AKP's Islamic character is certainly an important factor in fostering cooperation between Ankara and the Arab world. Arab leaders naturally feel more comfortable engaging with AKP leaders, who unlike the staunchly secular Kemalists are pious and appreciative of their traditional ties with Muslim states. Furthermore, the fact

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<sup>252</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 25.

<sup>253</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 14.

<sup>254</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 72.

that Turkey's foreign policy under the AKP is no longer strictly aligned with that of its Western allies, has gained Turkey popularity in the Arab world. Many Muslims countries, particularly Arab states, now admire and praise Turkey for its refusal to allow U.S. troops to use its bases for the invasion of Iraq and also for its condemnation of Israeli actions.

Turkey's active policy towards the Palestinian issue and Erdoğan's criticism of Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories, has won Ankara friends on the Arab street and the broader Middle East. Unlike the Arab leaders who have become meek about Israel's treatment of Palestinians, Erdoğan has remained consistently outspoken and has called out Israel on several occasions. Some believe that Turkey has now become the "new protagonist of the Palestinians."<sup>255</sup> In an interview with the International Crisis Group, an Egyptian official mentions how Turkey used to be known as 'atheist, anti-Islam, anti-Arab, the friend of Israel that abolished the caliphate.' Now however, many in the Arab world see a 'new Turkey' and are 'fascinated not only by Erdoğan, but the phenomenon of Turkey.' A Syrian official also stated that 'if Turkey didn't exist, we would have to invent it. There's an Arab vacuum. Turkey is good for us because it draws attention to the absolute lack of Arab initiatives.'<sup>256</sup> By taking a harder stance on Israel and pursuing a more independent policy in the region, Turkey has been able to enhance its prestige in the Middle East.

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<sup>255</sup> Yüksel Taşkın, "Turkey's Search for Regional Power," *Middle East Report Online*, August, 12, 2010, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero082110.html>.

<sup>256</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 21.

Turkey has increased its status as an important actor in the Middle East by not only committing itself to the region politically, but also by asserting its power culturally as well as economically. The AKP government has launched new programs and an Arabic-language satellite channel throughout the Middle East, with the aim of broadcasting positive views of Turkey.<sup>257</sup> Turkish soap operas and sitcoms dubbed in Arabic have become extremely popular in the Middle East. Moreover, Turkish films and music have spread throughout Middle Eastern markets.<sup>258</sup> Because of these efforts, many people in the Arab world have become more familiar and more appreciative of Turkish culture. According to the Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture, more than 300,000 tourists, mainly from the Middle East, have visited the house where the widely popular Turkish soap opera *Gümüş* is shot.<sup>259</sup> By exporting its culture to the countries of the Middle East, Turkey has been able to boost tourism, deepen its prestige, and strengthen its popularity in the region. In line with this soft power strategy, another way in which Turkey has asserted its power has been through economic means.

A main part of the AKP's strategy has been to strengthen Turkey's economies with the broader Middle East, which it has successfully achieved since coming to power in 2002. In 2007, Turkey's Foreign Trade Minister Kursad Tuzman announced that Ankara's plan to sign preferential trade agreements with eighteen Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Iran. He also stated that Turkey would work towards reducing its

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<sup>257</sup> Taşkın, "Turkey's Search for Regional Power."

<sup>258</sup> "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints," *International Crisis Group*, 13.

<sup>259</sup> "Turkish Soap Operas Total \$50 Million in Exports." *Hurriyet Daily News*. January 16, 2011, <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/n.php?n=turkish-soap-operas-total-50-million-in-exports-2011-01-16>.

tariff barriers in order to boost overall trade with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which includes the six Central Asian countries, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkey.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, according to data obtained from the Turkish Statistical Institute, the trade volume between Turkey and MENA (Middle East and North Africa) exceeded \$47 billion in 2008, a dramatic rise since 2002 when trade only amounted to approximately \$8 billion. Also in 2009, six Muslim countries consisting of Iraq, Iran, Algeria, U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, made it on the list of Turkey's top 15 trading partners.<sup>261</sup> Trade volumes are expected to rise between Turkey and its Middle Eastern partners, as Turkey just recently signed a deal with Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to formally create a free trade zone and has similar plans in mind with the Gulf countries in the region.<sup>262</sup> As the numbers demonstrate, trade ties with the broader Middle East have received particular attention under the AKP government and have increased significantly since 2002. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a strong capitalist economic force with backing from the Turkish government that is driving Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

According to Roula Khalaf, Middle East editor of the Financial Times, "the one consistent factor behind Ankara's revived interest in its neighborhood is economics." Khalaf believes that Turkey's growing economic prosperity has given it the confidence to expand and strengthen its global economic ties. Furthermore, given the fact that European

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<sup>260</sup> Taspinar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies*, 24.

<sup>261</sup> Source: IMF

<sup>262</sup> Ümit Enginsoy, "Turkey to Set Up Trade Zone with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan," *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 7, 2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-to-set-up-trade-zone-with-syria-lebanon-jordan-2010-11-07>.

economies are struggling, Turkey's search for alternative markets should come as no surprise.<sup>263</sup> Also, it is essential to highlight the important role Turkey's Anatolian Tigers and business leaders play in guiding Turkey's foreign policy in the region.

The ambitious entrepreneurs of the Anatolian Tigers that have helped Turkey become the 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world are now encouraging AKP leaders to pursue opportunities in the greater Middle East and Africa.<sup>264</sup> These conservative business leaders serve as unofficial advisers and ambassadors and now have a greater say in Turkish foreign policy. According to Janine Zacharai, a Middle East reporter for *The Washington Post*, "when President Abdullah Gul visited Cameroon last month to sign a free-trade accord and open a new embassy, he was accompanied by three cabinet ministers, four members of parliament -- and 147 businessmen."<sup>265</sup> Turkey is looking for new markets and new opportunities in areas where it has traditionally ignored in the past, particularly the Middle East. Turkey has been able to strengthen its economy by attracting billions of dollars in trade and investment from countries in the Middle East and intends to continue this trend. In 2008, Turkey attracted a total of \$4.3 billion in investment from Middle Eastern and Gulf Arabian countries. After the EU, these countries are now the second biggest investors in Turkey.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Roula Khalaf, "Turkey's Focus on its Backyard is driven by the Economy," *Financial Times*, July 27, 2010.

<sup>264</sup> "Anatolian Tigers Go Where Turkey's Diplomacy Leads," *Zaman*, July 15, 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-216064-anatolian-tigers-go-where-turkeys-diplomacy-leads.html>.

<sup>265</sup> Janine Zacharia, "Turkey Hopes to Grow Economic Ties and Influence within Middle East," *The Washington Post*, April 8, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/07/AR2010040705012.html>.

<sup>266</sup> Turkey, *FDI in Turkey*, <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-US/investmentguide/investorguide/pages/FDIinTurkey.aspx>.

No one can deny the fact that Turkey is increasingly expanding its economic influence in the Middle East. However, despite the growing volumes of trade between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries, these numbers are a small fraction of what Turkey trades with the EU. The EU is by far Turkey's biggest economic partner, both in terms of trade and investment. In 2008, for example, Turkey's overall trade with the European Union was three times higher than its trade with MENA. Also, since the AKP government came to power, trade with the European Union has been growing at a much faster rate, compared to trade with MENA.<sup>267</sup> Thus, although Turkey's growing economic ties are worth recognizing, since it had been stagnant in the past, it is also important to keep these numbers in perspective. Also, by comparing trade volumes, the argument that Turkey is looking for an alternative to the European Union can be refuted. Turkey is not trying to replace its economic ties with the EU but rather aiming to complement it by improving its economic relations with the Middle East and Far East. Moreover, Turkey has been pursuing trade relations with many other countries that do not fit the EU and MENA categories, such as Russia and China. Russia and China are currently among Turkey's biggest trade partners. In 2009, nearly 10% of Turkey's overall trade was with Russia and approximately 6% was with China; the two were respectively ranked as Turkey's second and third trade partners.<sup>268</sup> Thus, it can be said that Turkey's economic drive has a global nature and that Turkey's ultimate goal is to diversify its economic ties.

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<sup>267</sup> Data obtained from Turkish Statistical Institute.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.



## **Conclusion**

Turkey's internal and external evolution in the past decade has been remarkable. Turkey was once a rigidly secular, economically stagnant, and an undemocratic nation ruled by the Kemalist elite, whom refused to accept civilian rule. Today Turkey is a vibrant democratic country with a thriving economy and is governed by a moderate Islamic government. It is currently the world's 17<sup>th</sup> largest economy and it is expected to grow faster than those of almost all European and Middle Eastern countries. The political situation has also greatly improved. The mere fact that the AKP government has been able to stay in power for nearly a decade without being overthrown and closed down by the military is a clear sign of the positive changes taking place within Turkey. Erdoğan's AKP government has even been able to curtail the power of the military elite through its sweeping democratic reforms. Years of political stability and economic growth under AKP rule has boosted the nation's self-confidence and allowed the government to focus on diversifying Turkey's external policies.

Since coming to power in 2002, the AKP government has launched a new foreign policy agenda, one that is both dynamic and multi-faceted. Turkey has been implementing a "zero-problem with neighbors" policy, one that focuses on its Middle Eastern neighbors that had long been abandoned in the past. AKP leaders have reached out to the Middle East in order to enhance Turkey's economic and political clout and establish the republic as an active player in the region. Under the AKP, Turkey is behaving like a major regional power, relying on its past and present and solving



historical disagreements with countries like Syria, Kurdish Iraq, and Iran. After spending more than half a century denying its Ottoman past, Turkey is now embracing its Ottoman legacy and great geographical and historical depth. AKP leaders are more comfortable with Turkey's Ottoman past. Unlike the Kemalist elite, they have held on to their traditional and conservative values. They do not find it anyway contradicting for Turkey to be engaging in the broader Middle East while remaining a U.S. ally and seeking EU membership. In fact they believe that by rebuilding ties round the former Ottoman Empire, they will strengthen Turkey's power in regions where Western influence is weak, and in turn make Turkey more attractive to the European Union and the United States.

The question on Ankara's mind today is not whether Turkey should align itself with the West or the East, but rather, what can Turkey do to become a global superpower. For the AKP, part of the answer lies in Turkey's ability to seize its strategic potential and expand its influence in areas where it has traditionally ignored in the past. Through its new pragmatic foreign policy and soft power strategy, AKP has succeeded in increasing Turkey's prestige in the Middle East. Turkey's new involvement has been irksome to some U.S. policy makers and observers and there have been recent tension between the two countries. This should not however be surprising, given the new international environment. In the post-Cold War era, Turkey and the United States no longer share an existential threat. Thus, there is less need for Turkey to blindly emulate U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, in the post-9/11 environment, Turkey found itself increasingly at odds with U.S. policy in the region. The United State's aggressive stance towards Iraq and Iran

contradicted Ankara's "zero-problem with neighbors" policy and its soft power approach. Washington's policies in addition to U.S. disregard for Turkish interests caused Ankara to pursue its own independent path. An independent Turkish course of action does not however mean a rejection of Western ties. Turkey's influence in the West is what makes it attractive to the East as well as vice versa. Turkey is not going to jeopardize its global importance by turning away from the United States or the European Union. Turkey is looking for various ways to enhance its power and EU membership would certainly maximize its strategic clout. However, it is mainly up to the European Union to decide whether they want to put their prejudices aside and unblock the negotiation chapters that are keeping Turkey from gaining membership. Nonetheless, whether it joins the EU or not, Turkey is going to continue the broadening and diversification of its foreign policy.

Turkey is poised to be an indispensable power. No other country lies at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, with access to the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Europe. In addition to its geographical location, its sheer size and its population of 70 million further enhance its importance. It currently has the second largest population in the Middle East (Egypt's population exceeds by 6 million), and is expected to become the most populous nation in Europe within a few decades. Furthermore, excluding Israel, Turkey is the strongest military power in the Middle East. With nearly 515,000 troops, it is the second largest army of NATO (after the United States).<sup>269</sup> Moreover, unlike its Middle Eastern neighbors, Turkey is not a major oil

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<sup>269</sup> Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic*, 81.

producer but it is an increasingly important oil transit country. It plays a key role in the energy-pipeline business and is currently working on multiple projects such as Nabucco, aimed at transporting oil and gas from various suppliers in Asia to consumers in Europe.<sup>270</sup> To add to its uniqueness and global significance, Turkey is also a rare and shining example in the Muslim world of a robust democracy with the rule of law and a thriving free-market economy. In short, these characteristics coupled with Turkey's ability to balance its relations between East and West are bound to transform Turkey into the next superpower.

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

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